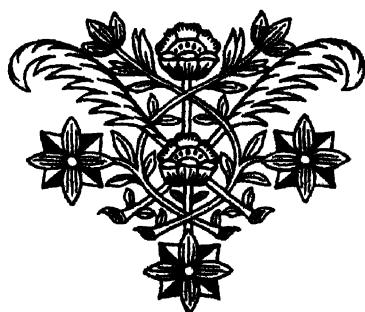




*A History of*  
**SHAKESPEARIAN  
CRITICISM**

*By*  
**AUGUSTUS RALLI**



**VOLUME I**



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## ENGLAND 1598-1694

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IN reading the earliest critical remarks on Shakespeare we must bear in mind the imperfect state of criticism itself. The treatises of Aristotle, Quintilian, Longinus, Dante had been merely occasional, and not until the sixteenth century, in Italy, during the Renaissance, was criticism recognized as a separate art and a branch of literature. Its main stream has been followed by Professor Saintsbury, and its various ill phases pointed out, from some of which, as the latest of the arts, it has not even yet freed itself; it therefore suffices to say here that most of the opinions expressed on Shakespeare during his lifetime, or for nearly a century after, are interesting historically rather than intrinsically—being either whimsical and irregular, or enslaved by the rules of an art as yet too uncertain of itself to be liberal.

Francis Meres<sup>1</sup> in 1598 includes Shakespeare with Sidney, Spenser, Daniel, Drayton, Warner, Marlowe, Chapman as one of the enrichers of the English tongue. The author of the *Venus* and *Lucrece* is 'mellifluous and hony-tongued', and the Sonnets are 'sugred'. If the Muses spoke English they would use Shakespeare's 'fine-filed phrase'. The Latins accounted Plautus and Seneca best for comedy and tragedy; but Shakespeare, in England, excels in both, and is also among the best lyric poets. At least this shows how early the conception of Shakespeare as a universal genius had dawned; and we note the tribute to his 'fine-filed phrase' as a warning to those later critics who considered that he lacked art.

Gabriel Harvey,<sup>2</sup> in a manuscript note of about 1598 or 1600, asserts that the younger ones delight in *Venus*, but those who are wiser in *Lucrece* and *Hamlet*.

Ben Jonson<sup>2</sup> prefixed to the First Folio (1623) a critical poem which starts by affirming that Shakespeare cannot be praised too much; that he is 'Soule of the Age'; above all poets such as Chaucer, Spenser, Beaumont; even excelling 'Marlowe's mighty line'. The famous statement follows that he had 'small Latin and less Greeke', yet none the less may he be compared to 'thundering Aeschylus' or any of the

<sup>1</sup> *Sh. Allusion Book* (ed. J. Munro, Chatto & Windus, 1909).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*



poets of 'insolent Greece or haughty Rome', and the section concludes with the equally famous verse: 'He was not of an age but for all time!' Nature and art now become the topics, and the 'nature' of Aristophanes, Terence, Plautus pales before Shakespeare's. Not that he lacked art, for a good poet is made as well as born, and he did toil to 'strike the second heat', and produce his 'well turned and true-filed lines'. We must note this tribute of Ben Jonson to Shakespeare's art, for Ben Jonson's plays are thought to owe more to art than inspiration, and he is said to have envied Shakespeare his popular successes. He was a scholar in the technical sense, which Shakespeare was not, and is popularly supposed to have made of his more exact knowledge a weapon to injure Shakespeare.

He pursues this theme in *Timber* some years later in a more strictly critical spirit. 'Would he had blotted a thousand', he replies to those who commended Shakespeare for never blotting out a line. Disclaiming any prejudice, for, he says, he loved the man and honours his memory on this side Idolatry, he blames his facility. His wit was in his own power; would the rule of it had been so too; for many times he fell into those things that could not escape laughter.

Shakespeare's fellow-actors, Heminge and Condell, who collected his plays and printed the First Folio, likewise prefixed an address with some critical remarks. They call him a happy imitator and gentle expresser of nature, and it is they who use the phrase which drew Ben Jonson's fire, that there was scarce a blot in his papers.

Some anonymous verses prefixed to the Second Folio (1632) attribute to Shakespeare only the power to excite in the soul two different passions—those of comedy and tragedy. Another poet-critic, in the same place, under the initials I. M. S., describes Shakespeare's mind as reflecting ages past, and able to raise up ancient sovereigns and make us feel their joy or rage, yet to temper passion so that we take pleasure in pain, and both weep and smile. In fine, by heavenly fire he 'moulds us anew': and thus, whether consciously or not, fulfils the object of tragedy according to Aristotle.

John Hales of Eton,<sup>1</sup> about 1633, replies to Ben Jonson's charge that Shakespeare had not read the ancients, and affirms 'that if he would produce any one Topick finely treated by any of them, he would undertake to shew something upon the same subject at least as well written by Shakespeare'. This is another spontaneous tribute to Shakespeare's universal quality, more characteristic of the private reader, who tells faithfully what impresses him, than the professional critic.

In 1640 a new edition of Shakespeare's poems was published, and appended to it was a poem written some three years earlier by an anonymous author.<sup>2</sup> The tribute he pays to Shakespeare's 'smooth Rhimes' is no new one, but he proceeds to say that nature admires

<sup>1</sup> *Sh. Allusion Book.*

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

herself in Shakespeare, and recognizes his 'dressing was her chiefest comeliness'. On the same occasion John Benson praises Shakespeare's poems as serene, clear, and elegantly plain, neither intricate nor cloudy so as to puzzle the intellect, but perfectly eloquent.<sup>1</sup>

The rhymed Prologue to this edition was contributed by Leonard Digges, and he preaches on the text that poets are born not made, to the gain of Shakespeare and loss of Ben Jonson. An audience ravished by *Julius Caesar* would not brook a word of *Catiline*. He vindicates Shakespeare from borrowing a phrase from Greeks or Latins, or gleanings from the works of contemporaries; but his most noteworthy line is that Shakespeare had 'art without art unparaleld as yet'.

Samuel Shephard (1646) rates Shakespeare equal to the Greek tragedians and above Aristophanes in comedy, while his *Lucretia* shows that he understood the depth of poesy.<sup>1</sup> The same year or thereabout Robert Wild, exalting his wit, as instanced by Falstaff, laments his lack of learning. Had he united the two 'Ben would have blushed, and Jonson never writ'.<sup>1</sup>

These selected early critics satisfy more than those about to follow, for their criticism is mostly praise, and of a kind more definite and particular and less vague and general than is commonly supposed.

Two poetical criticisms of 1647—Sir John Denham's and William Cartwright's—witness that Shakespeare's reputation was eclipsed by Fletcher's.<sup>1</sup> The former finds the results of Jonson's labour and Shakespeare's ease united in Fletcher; the latter condemns the wit of Shakespeare's 'Fooles and Clowns' as old fashioned, such as 'our nice times' would call obscenity. 'Nature was all his art . . .' he concludes. A few years later (1651) Samuel Shephard, whom we have already noticed, wrote in an epigram that Fletcher and Beaumont are now the shining lights, Jonson is forgotten, and Shakespeare's sun quite shrunk beneath a cloud.<sup>1</sup>

The tide of depreciation continued to flow, and Cowley (1656) compared all the dramatists just mentioned to vintners who dilute good wine to make it yield more profit. He would cheerfully undertake to prune their poems and lop many away.<sup>1</sup>

Richard Flecknoe (1660) states concisely what no doubt were the accepted opinions of the literary and theatrical world: that Shakespeare excelled in a natural vein, Fletcher in wit, and Jonson in gravity. To compare Jonson with Shakespeare would reveal the difference between nature and art, and with Fletcher, between wit and judgement.<sup>1</sup>

We now come to Pepys, whose *Diary* in the years 1660-9 contains remarks on the performances of Shakespeare's plays which he witnessed. Pepys was not a critic in the strict sense, but, against the opinion long held that he was a typical average Englishman, it has been wisely said that the average Englishman does not write one of the best books in

<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

his country's literature. He was in any case a frank impressionist, and it must be borne in mind that the plays he saw had probably been altered by Davenant. *Macbeth* seems to be his favourite play, and to grow upon him the more he sees it. The first time it is only 'pretty good'—and he saw it again to his 'great content'. The *Tempest* also pleased him the more he saw it; and he was 'mightily pleased' with *Hamlet*. He read and re-read *Othello* and esteemed it 'mighty good', till he chanced upon a play called *The Adventures of Five Houres*, and that made *Othello* seem 'a mean thing'. *M.N.D.* was the most insipid ridiculous play he ever saw in his life, and *Twelfth-Night* a silly play. Some years later he saw the latter again and still condemned it as one of the weakest plays he ever saw on the stage. His fellow-diarist, John Evelyn, saw *Hamlet* and mentions that the old plays begin to disgust this refined age.

With Thomas Fuller (1662) we get again the comparisons and set opinions of the professional criticism of the day. Like Plautus, Shakespeare is an exact comedian who could also write tragedy, but he instances the rule that poets are born not made, and nature itself was all the art used upon him.<sup>1</sup>

An interesting tribute to Shakespeare's universality comes from Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle, in 1664. He expresses to the life all sorts of persons, humours, natures, passions—as if he had been transformed into each person he describes. You would even think he had been metamorphosed from man to woman, so well does he describe Cleopatra and other women. In tragedy he presents passions so naturally and misfortunes so probably as to pierce his readers' souls and force tears from their eyes. He had a clear judgement, a quick wit, a spreading fancy, a subtle observation, a deep apprehension, a most eloquent elocution. He was a natural orator and poet, inexhaustibly witty and eloquent—for he infused his own wit and language into the bare designs of the plots he took from history. This latter statement and the earlier one that he excelled in drawing women, stand out from the conventional phrases about art and nature of the schools, or the mere impressionism, which have occupied us so far. In another letter she rates her husband as being far beyond Shakespeare for comical humour as Shakespeare beyond an ordinary poet in that way; and her husband was the best heroic poet in any age.<sup>2</sup> We recall Thackeray's drummer who chronicled the victories of his drummer-grandsire, but generously admitted that Monsieur Turenne might at least have had a share in them.

The great name of Dryden now confronts us, and his remarks on Shakespeare range over the years between 1668 and 1694. First comes the *Essay on Dramatick Poesie* where, breaking loose from received rules and opinions, he boldly estimates Shakespeare as 'the man who of

<sup>1</sup> *Sh. Allusion Book.*

<sup>2</sup> *Sociable Letters*, CXXIII, CLXII.

all modern, and perhaps ancient poets, had the largest and most comprehensive soul'. He continues: 'Those who accuse him to have wanted learning, give him the greater commendation: he was naturally learned; he needed not the spectacles of books to read nature; he looked inwards, and found her there. I cannot say he is everywhere alike; were he so, I should do him injury to compare him with the greatest of mankind. He is many times flat, insipid; his comic wit degenerating into clenches, his serious swelling into bombast. But he is always great when some great occasion is presented to him: no man can say he ever had a fit subject for his wit and did not then raise himself as high above the rest of the poets'. This was the escape of Dryden's poetic soul into the Paradise of true criticism; but he is nearer to his age when he blames Shakespeare in his historical plays for cramping the business of thirty or forty years into a representation of two hours and a half. This, he says, was to look on nature through the wrong end of a perspective and receive her images not only less but more imperfect than the life, and so make a play ridiculous rather than delightful. Shakespeare and Fletcher wrote plays with irregular plots; only Ben Jonson's plays were perfect; yet we admire Ben Jonson and love Shakespeare.

In the Prologue to *Julius Caesar* Shakespeare is again praised for artless beauty, and for unconsciously excelling in a manner which the learned, observant Jonson could not. In the *Conquest of Granada* Dryden's evil critical angel almost overcomes the good in their struggle for his soul. He admits that Shakespeare and Fletcher have great wit and noble expression, but they lived in ignorant times when poetry was hardly beyond infancy, and so their plots were lame or made up of ridiculous incoherent stories. Many—such as the *W. Tale* or *M. for M.*—are either grounded on impossibilities or so meanly written that the comedy cannot make us laugh or the serious part concern us. Some of Macbeth's speeches are bombast, and cannot be understood; and Jonson was right to say the effect was horror. We get a gleam of light when he admits that Shakespeare has often written better than any poet in any language, but it is hurriedly quenched by the remark that he writes in many places below the dullest writer of ours or any age.

Seven years later (1679) Dryden opens his Preface to *T. and C.* with one of his trumpet-blasts of eulogy: that we venerate Shakespeare like the Greeks Aeschylus, only more justly; but he soon returns to the flats of contemporary criticism. Since his day language is more refined, and many of his phrases that are still intelligible are coarse or ungrammatical, and his style is so pestered with figurative expressions that it is affected as well as obscure. His genius is more bold and masculine than Fletcher's, and he moves terror while Fletcher moves compassion. In character-drawing Shakespeare excels—a character being 'a composition of qualities which are not contrary to one another in the same person': such as Falstaff who was liar, coward, glutton, buffoon.

Caliban is a species of himself, a person not in nature, and he is most judiciously furnished with a distinctive person, language, character. Yet it surprises us to learn that one person drew even more characters than Shakespeare and discriminated them better—and that person was Ben Jonson. Shakespeare's judgement succumbed to the fury of his fancy, and he coined new words and phrases and overdid metaphors. In the quarrel between Brutus and Cassius the passions are natural, the thoughts arise from the matter, and the expression is not viciously figurative. The deposition scene in *Richard II* surpasses anything in any language. Replace Shakespeare's bombast with simple words, and the beauty of his thought will remain. He excels in scenes between man and man, Fletcher between man and woman; therefore the one best describes friendship and the other love. Again the lamp flares up before it expires: Shakespeare had a universal mind comprehending all characters and passions—and Fletcher was but a limb of Shakespeare.

In his last utterance Dryden affirms that English comedy has surpassed that of the ancients, and so has English tragedy, despite its irregularities—and that Shakespeare had a genius for it. . . .

It may be said of Dryden more than any man that his virtues were his own, his faults those of his age. He repeated the word first spoken by Longinus that the object of a literary work is to 'transport': a saying so true yet so neglected that it had to be formulated afresh by Pater. But again and again, after one of his flights of praise, he droops his wings and settles upon earth, and blames Shakespeare according to current orthodox notions of what verse should be, or tragedy or comedy, or plot or character-drawing. In the long critical battle of the ages Dryden played a hero's part, yet at times he departed from the modern critic's rule to judge by the impression. Himself a poet, he blamed Shakespeare for exceeding in metaphor, and it is amusing to think that in our own time this same charge has been brought against Dryden's prose. His great contribution was the character of Shakespeare quoted at length from the *Essay on Dramatick Poesie*. It strikes like the crescent of the new moon on the night of contemporary criticism—but the main body of the radiant orb was long to remain in darkness.

Edward Phillips (1675), setting aside questions of decorum and economy in which others excelled, claimed that Shakespeare attained the loftiest tragic height, most exactly represented nature, and, in place of learning, pleased with a certain wild and native elegance, besides an unvulgar style.<sup>1</sup>

Nahum Tate (1680) doubted whether common report of Shakespeare's want of learning was wholly true; and he instances the exact manner in which he had reproduced Rome. Nor is it only the externals that you see, 'but the particular genius of the man'. No man was more

<sup>1</sup> *Sh. Allusion Book*.

TEMPLE 1690. SEDLEY 1693. DRAKE 1699. RYMER 1692-1693 7  
versed in men and things, as a dramatic writer should be, and, like a diligent spy upon nature, he traced her through her darkest recesses. The following year he makes a pregnant remark to which we shall return later: that Lear's real and Edgar's pretended madness have so much of extravagant nature that only Shakespeare's creating fancy could have produced them. The images and language, though odd and surprising, are yet so agreeable and proper that nothing else could have replaced them.<sup>1</sup> The gist of the matter was in Tate; he has exactly surveyed the Shakespearian country and marked where the mightiest roads were afterwards to be built.

Shakespeare, says Sir William Temple (1690), was the first to open the vein of humour on our stage, which has run pleasantly since: a remark worth noting because he intends 'humour' in a more modern sense than the 'humours' of Ben Jonson.<sup>1</sup>

In his Prologue to the *Wary Widow* (1693) Sir Charles Sedley laments that his age neglects Shakespeare. He had a fruitful genius and happy wit; he was the pride of nature and the shame of schools; a creator, not a mere learner from rules.

Drake (1699), surveying the ancient and modern stages, ranks Shakespeare first among the dramatists, though yielding in art to Ben Jonson and dialogue to Beaumont and Fletcher. Nothing in ancient drama can rival the plot of *Hamlet* for its admirable distribution of poetic justice, where the criminals are taken in their own toils. All Shakespeare's tragedies are moral and instructive, and many of them in this exceed the best of antiquity.<sup>1</sup>

We now come to Thomas Rymer<sup>2</sup> who starts by comparing the ancients and moderns, greatly to the disadvantage of the latter. The plot of a tragedy is its soul, and with the ancients it was a reasonable soul, with the moderns a brutish soul. Had the English continued the work of the Greek tragedians they might have surpassed them, but they chose irregular ways. The ancients made their criminals worthy to be pitied, but the moderns, by permitting murder on the stage, shut out their criminals from pity. The sight of the fact impressed too strongly, and no art could afterwards subdue it. When punishment followed crime the ancients used their art to find extenuating circumstances and waken pity for the guilty person.

Drama flourished in Athens, whereas in Rome it became merely a show to please the eye. In modern times England has excelled her neighbours in poetry, and on the stage *Othello* takes the first place. The fable or soul is the poet's part, because he takes characters from the moral philosopher, thoughts from the teachers of rhetoric, expression from the grammarians. Here the moral instructs, but the fable is improbable and absurd, the characters or manners unnatural and

<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

<sup>2</sup> *Tragedies of the Last Age* 1678 and *Short View of Tragedy*, 1692-3.

improper. Othello, a Venetian general, does nothing in character; and when maddened by jealousy deposes Iago to kill the rival, and himself kills the silly unresisting woman. This is no part of a soldier's character, and there never was in tragedy, comedy, or nature such a soldier as Iago. To surprise the audience Shakespeare made him false and insinuating instead of frank and plain-dealing. A soldier is the knave, and a Venetian lady the fool; therefore such characters can neither profit nor delight an audience; nor can they utter any fine or noble thoughts. The same applies to meaning and expression, of which there is more in the neighing of a horse or growling of a mastiff than in Shakespeare's tragical flights. The Duke and Senators neglect the state affairs to hear Brabantio's private griefs, and they all wish their daughters as happily married. Desdemona, on arriving at Cyprus, indulges in farce of a 'Jack-pudden' kind with Iago, when any moment may bring news that her lord is drowned. The cause of all this was the illiterate audience, the carpenters and cobblers for whom Shakespeare wrote—thus profaning the name of tragedy. Othello, called from his bridal chamber to settle a brawl, behaves like a phlegmatic Justice Clod-pate, not a fiery soldier. The temptation scene has attained first place in our theatre by its mops and mows, its grimaces, grins, and gesticulations. Words should merely beat time to the action, here they encumber it. Othello shows no soldier's mettle, but gapes after every paltry insinuation, and labours to be jealous. The foundation of the play is monstrous, and produces nothing but horror and aversion. Everything proclaims Othello jealous, but Desdemona is blind and deaf, and harps only on 'Cassio'. Such a monster as Iago never existed; he has no reason to hate Desdemona: and to abet her murder has nothing of the soldier, the man, or nature in it. Shakespeare does all by contraries, to surprise the audience with what is horrible and prodigious. Othello treats Desdemona as a drunken tinker might treat his drab. A noble Venetian lady is murdered for being a fool. The catastrophe cannot instruct, for she had done nothing to deserve her fate. The last speeches remind us of the criminals at Tyburn, only there we have justice, here neither justice, reason, law, humanity. The tragical part is a bloody farce without salt or savour.

In *Julius Caesar* he sins not only against nature and philosophy, but history also. It is sacrilege to put the noblest Romans into fools' coats; but his head was full of villainous images, and he merely took great names to recommend them to the world. Brutus in his true historical character is humane; and then he speaks of bathing his hands in Caesar's blood. In such a bare-faced manner does Shakespeare proceed from contradiction to contradiction. He is out of his element in tragedy, his genius being for comedy and humour where he might please the cobblers. . . .

The right word to describe Rymer's criticism is 'atheistic'. The

agnostics of last century assumed such a thing as 'external reality'—a universe with iron laws revealing no trace of God or the soul. Modern thought has corrected them by affirming that the human mind is part of reality, and no estimate of the universe can exclude the soul with its experience, its powers, and its hopes. We may say of Rymer that he exceeded the agnostic view—as Morley said of Bradlaugh that blank negation could go no further. Poetry arises in the poet's soul and is addressed to the reader's: but Rymer had not experienced Shakespeare. He approaches him as the agnostics approached their dead universe—and his is not criticism but dissection. We have exposed him at length that the reader may judge fairly, but instead of refuting him at length we will take one crucial instance; his charge against the Venetian Senate for preferring Othello's private affairs to those of the State in time of war. This is literally true—but the being whose soul is not ravished by Othello's story of how he won Desdemona, till he forgets the external order, had better close the book. Rymer continues that the Senators take his part, and all wish their daughters as happily married. Surely the beauty of the passage alluded to is doubled by the Duke's comment, 'I think this tale would win my daughter too'. We do not blame Rymer for having preconceived ideas of what the drama should be: such were inevitable in the then state of criticism. We blame his atheism: for, having no sense of poetical mysteries, he has as little right to legislate on aesthetic matters as Bradlaugh on religious. He is 'a critic and no critic', to parody Beaumont and Fletcher—or, more truly still, in the words of Professor Saintsbury, 'the worst critic that has ever been'.

Charles Gildon attacks Rymer as a 'hypercritic', and says that Shakespeare's excellence is built on innate worth, not show, action, pronunciation.<sup>1</sup> If Desdemona is too humble for the drama, Homer's Juno, who talked Billingsgate, is too low for the epic. Mr. Hales of Eton started a debate between Shakespeare's friends and enemies, and the judges unanimously preferred Shakespeare above all Greek and Roman poets. If Shakespeare faulted it was because he had to please the audience he depended on, and so he mingled comic and tragic. He knew nothing of Aristotle and the unities, but the greatest ignore rules and mix virtues and vices. Despite his faults he attained the end of all just poems—pleasure and profit—by moving terror and pity for changes of fortune. Rymer blames the Venetians for employing a Moor, but it is a vice of mankind to despise black races, and the poet must represent things as they should be, not as they are. It is false to say that Desdemona perverts nature by loving Othello. His known and experienced virtue gave credit and authority to what he said, and would wake pity and admiration. His speech about cannibals has poetical probability, and would raise her idea of his dangers, and is no more

<sup>1</sup> *Some Reflections on Mr. Rymer's Short View of Tragedy*, 1694.



absurd than Virgil's Cyclops and Harpies. Both Homer and Sophocles prefer the admirable to the probable—such as the story of Oedipus; whereas Othello's jealousy and Iago's revenge are the natural consequences of our ungoverned passions. The morals of *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, and most of Shakespeare's plays are mightier than any in Sophocles except the *Electra*. Iago is a true Italian, and we cannot expect his soldier's profession to purge away his vices. Expression is excellent as it gives a full and clear idea of things. Contrast Richard II and Bolingbroke riding through the streets, and we get a perfect union of the beauties of thought and expression. There is no bombast in Shakespeare: that is, ill-matched words and thoughts. His words fix the image in our minds, and satisfy us, and the more we view the image the more it gains upon us. Rymer is palpably wrong about the temptation scene, for half words and ambiguous reflexions do work up jealousy. . . .

It was not hard to refute Rymer, but in doing so Gildon has made some critical remarks that are worth study. He is confident in rating Shakespeare above Greek and Latin poets, which shows that Dryden's opinion had prevailed; and he is liberal-minded in absolving him from Aristotelian rules. He skilfully vindicates Shakespeare's conception of Iago; and judges that we gain from his poems both pleasure and profit: though it must be admitted that Rymer, strangely enough, believed that the end of poetry was to please. When Gildon remarks that Shakespeare's words fix the image in our minds, and the more we view it the more it gains upon us, he almost anticipates some modern comments on Shakespeare's extraordinary power over words.

A hundred years lie between Meres and Gildon, and we will now cast a backward glance, omitting for the moment Ben Jonson and Dryden whose names rise like peaks above the others. The first thing to strike is the power with which Shakespeare impressed himself upon the soul of the century, and the failure of its intellect to decide the impression. This was largely because critical lights were as glow-worms in a benighted territory; terms like 'nature' and 'art' had fixed meanings, and the function of the imagination had yet to be discovered. Comparison, the critic's chief weapon, rather tells against Shakespeare; for mid-century writers like Cartwright, Shephard, Cowley, Flecknoe compared him to his disadvantage with Ben Jonson and Beaumont and Fletcher. The general average estimate of the century, however, was that Shakespeare was England's greatest, because most universal, poet—perhaps the world's greatest poet, because in drama he rivalled, if not surpassed, the Greek tragedians and the Latin comedians, and his stream of narrative verse flowed as smoothly as Ovid's. He is admitted to have excelled in 'nature'—a word we should now replace by 'realism': his readers or audience ascribing the tremendous impression on their minds from characters such as Hamlet, Lear, Macbeth to Shakespeare's literal rendering of external fact. Nahum Tate, who

spoke of Shakespeare's 'creating fancy', was the first to hint at the strange power of the imagination. The complaint that he wanted art does not apply to his verse at its best, on which epithets such as 'fine-filed' and 'honeyed' have been lavished, but rather to scenes of secondary importance where clowns and jesters held the stage—and also to the construction of his plays as a whole. The critics of the schools, led by Ben Jonson, required the Aristotelian unities, and were horror-struck at the loose joins of the chronicle plays, or at a play like *A. and C.* where the action was divided between Rome, Athens, and Egypt—or the fifteen years covered by the *W. Tale*. Yet there are not wanting critics who insist that Shakespeare had unparalleled art, and that, apart from rules, he achieved the end of poetry which is pleasure and moral profit.<sup>1</sup>

One of the frankest tributes to Shakespeare's power is paid by Pepys, who records his experience in a disinterested manner. Each time he saw *Macbeth* and the *Tempest* he liked them better—and so it must have been with many thousands of contemporary Londoners. Margaret Cavendish, as we saw, first noted the exquisite skill with which Shakespeare discriminated women. If then we search through the foregoing, and separate impression from judgement, we shall not accept the popular view that Shakespeare was slightly regarded in the seventeenth century. Though the impression, as it rose in the heart, was often dispersed by the east wind of orthodoxy, opinion was slowly crystallizing that he was the greatest and most universal world-poet. As the fragments of the old land worn down by sea or river go to form the new, so there were building in the deeps of the mind new conceptions of an art beyond the laws of Aristotle.

If we revert for a moment to the very learned world we shall see a process like our planet's of alternate night and day. Milton's lines of Jonson's learned sock and Shakespeare's native wood-notes will express the attitude most concisely. Jonson's mind was critical, and he wrote his plays in a critic's spirit more than a poet's—but he was great enough to discern Shakespeare's opposite genius. Yet he turned from the sun, and, in *Timber*, withdrew much of his earlier praise by over-insisting on Shakespeare's carelessness and facility. Dryden's first splendid eulogy equals or surpasses Jonson's, but he, too, was overtaken by the night of fixed ideas. Like Ronsard, Tasso, Milton he was haunted by the abstract idea of the Virgilian form of epic or Euripidean form of tragedy before the subject was determined at all.<sup>2</sup>

Mr. Munro, in his introduction to the *Sh. Allusion Book*, warns against the exuberance of Elizabethan and Jacobean praises of Shakespeare, born of a splendid enthusiasm for literature.

<sup>2</sup> See W. P. Ker's *Collected Essays*, i. 14.

## Chapter II

### ENGLAND 1709-1761

I. ROWE. II. ADDISON. III. DENNIS. IV. GILDON. V. POPE. VI. THEOBALD. VII. HANMER. VIII. WARBURTON. IX. EDWARDS. X. WHALLEY. XI. LENNOX. XII. HUME. XIII. BLAIR. XIV. KAMES. XV. CONCLUSION.

#### I

IN the seventeenth century Shakespeare's works had been reprinted in folio editions, but in 1709 Nicholas Rowe published an edition in six volumes to which he prefixed a critical biography. He takes the view that nature did much for Shakespeare and art little, and that he knew nothing of the ancients, or, having such delicate taste, and as much if not more genius than theirs, he would have incorporated some of their fine images. Yet, had he done so, he might have lost some of his fire and impetuosity and beautiful extravagance. Not that he lacked judgement, but what he thought was great and rightly conceived, and wanted little or no correction. What nature gave him outbalanced what books gave Ben Jonson, and while Jonson borrowed greatly Shakespeare took only the foundation of his tale.

His plays can be divided into tragedies and comedies; the former include the histories and some comedies. Tragi-comedy was a mistake of the age; but his comical humours entertain greatly. There is much variety in his characters, and Falstaff is a masterpiece whose wit makes him almost too agreeable, despite his faults, so that we regret to see his friend Hal use him scurvily at the end. Shylock is incomparably drawn, and surely his deadly spirit of revenge proves that Shakespeare intended him as a tragic character.

His images are so lively that the thing stands full before you, and you possess every part of it. His doggerel rhymes and jingling and playing on words were vices of his age. He is never so great as where he gives a loose rein to his imagination and raises his fancy to a flight above mankind and the limits of the visible world: as in the *Tempest*, *M.N.D.*, *Macbeth*, *Hamlet*. The *Tempest* is his most perfect work, and exactly keeps the unities—an uncommon trait in his writings. It departs widely from truth, but so finely that one believes against reason. Caliban is a new character, and fitted with a new language.

If we judge Shakespeare by Aristotle's rules we can easily find fault, but he lived under a kind of mere light of nature, in a state of almost universal licence and ignorance, where every one followed his own fancy. He did not excel in invention, but borrowed his plots, and extended time excessively, but he made up by his characters. Whether English or Roman they are as exact in the poet as the historian. In

prosperity Wolsey is a cruel and insolent tyrant, but with wonderful address he secures general compassion in his fall and ruin. With Brutus, Antony, and others Shakespeare designs rather to describe them in their several fortunes and accidents of their lives than to concentrate on any single great action. *Hamlet* is founded on much the same tale as the *Electra* of Sophocles; but Orestes imbrues his hands in the blood of his own mother, whereas Shakespeare avoids this horror. With wonderful art and judgement Shakespeare makes the ghost restrain Hamlet from doing violence to his mother: and thus he distinguishes between horror and terror. The latter is the proper passion of tragedy, and no one has succeeded in raising it like Shakespeare. He moves our souls as strongly as they can be moved—as the murder of Duncan also proves. . . .

Rowe was evidently a man of fine taste, who praises Shakespeare for the right things—his imagination, his character-drawing, his judgement, taste, instinct. He had the learning of his time, but was not encumbered by it. He neither apologizes for Shakespeare's lack of 'art' and invention nor blames him for it. He has the great merit of judging the plays in a disinterested manner, and realizing that the impression which they left on the reader's mind was the important thing, whether or not it had been produced in the traditional manner. His weak points are his regret for tragi-comedy, and his praise of the characters for their mere historical truth. Certain of his remarks touch unexhausted questions of the present day: viz. on Shylock, Falstaff, the distinction between terror and horror, &c.

## II

IN the same year (1709) Addison alludes to the crowing of the cock in *Hamlet*, which he calls a country tradition remade into a beautiful piece of poetry by the agreeable wildness of Shakespeare's imagination. In the next two years some sentences about Shakespeare will be found scattered through the *Spectator*.<sup>1</sup> He compares the modern version of *Lear*, altered to accord with conventional ideas of poetical justice, unfavourably with the admirable tragedy left by Shakespeare. He excuses the puns in Shakespeare's tragedies, since other serious writers—like Bishop Andrewes in his sermons—have done the same. He instances Homer and Shakespeare as great natural geniuses never disciplined and broken by rules of art. But where he strikes us most is in dealing with Shakespeare's purely imaginative characters—fairies, witches, magicians, demons, departed spirits. His noble extravagance of fancy enables him to touch this weak superstitious part of his reader's imagination, and succeed with no support but his own genius. The wild yet solemn speech of these persons convinces us, though we have

<sup>1</sup> *Tatler*, 111; *Spectator*, 40, 61, 160, 419.

no rules to apply; but we feel that did such beings exist in the world, thus would they speak and act. This passage interests strongly because it shows that though the critic was still outside the country of the imagination, he had at least entered one of the shadowed avenues that lead towards it, and was aware of a light that never was on sea and land.<sup>1</sup>

### III

JOHN DENNIS<sup>2</sup> considers Shakespeare one of the world's greatest geniuses for the tragic stage. He was under greater disadvantages than his successors, but excelled them in beauties; and his beauties he owed to his own nature, his faults to his education and age. His imaginations were just, bold, and strong; he had instinctive discretion and strong, penetrating judgement. Time and leisure would have taught him the rules of his art, and if he ever fails in character-drawing it is because he did not know art or history. He does not falsify the passions, like his successors, by making love predominate over all; but he touched them with so fine a talent that they often move us more without their due preparations than those of other tragic poets who have all the beauty of design. Terror was his master passion; and had he been aided by art and learning he might have surpassed the ancients.<sup>3</sup> He originated the harmony of blank verse—often diversified by endings of two and three syllables which distinguish it from heroic harmony and fit it for common use and action and dialogue.

If Shakespeare had such qualities by nature what might he not have been with the art and learning which would have saved him from the gross mistakes he made in historical characters! Coriolanus is at first frank and magnanimous, and then a fawning traitor. The mob in *J.C.* offend against the majesty of the Roman people. There is no impartial distribution of justice; for the good should prosper and the bad suffer. *Coriolanus* is without a moral; neither do the tragedies instruct, because guilty and innocent perish promiscuously. This makes us question the government of Providence, and sceptics resolve it into chance. Shakespeare, however, did wonders even without art, but the greatest genius was Virgil who added art to nature.

Shakespeare cannot have had familiar acquaintance with Greek and Latin authors or he would not have failed in art; unless he discerned less than his inferior successors—that these authors were just and great and harmonious in design, and their designs were based on reasonable rules. He abounds in anachronisms; he lets Plutarch guide him in Roman affairs rather than Livy. He converts the eloquent Menenius into a buffoon; and had he read either Sallust or Cicero he would never

<sup>1</sup> Does not this contradict Professor Saintsbury's assertion that imagination to Addison meant something external—that which supplies images?

<sup>2</sup> *Essay on the Genius and Writings of Sh.*, 1711.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Rowe.

have made Caesar a fourth-rate actor in his own tragedy. We ask in vain for Caesar's unequalled greatness of mind, his unbounded thirst for glory, and the victorious eloquence with which he triumphed over friends and enemies. Brutus should have replied to the fault-finding Cassius that if Caesar had the same natural imperfections as themselves, neither of them had Caesar's qualities. But then Caesar should have made all this good; and he should have justified his actions and shown that only an empty shadow of public liberty remained. The Gracchi had failed to restore the Agrarian, and it was Caesar's duty to restore it and re-establish the Commonwealth. Had Caesar aimed at the sovereignty in order to re-establish liberty he would have surpassed all mortals in goodness as much as he did in the rest of his qualities. Sallust and Cicero believed that Caesar might do this; and had Shakespeare known their works he would have given us another character of Caesar. He might have written a scene where Caesar debates with Cicero and Antony whether to retain the absolute sovereignty he had won by war or re-establish liberty. It would have required the finest art and shown all Caesar's great qualities.

It has been argued that since Shakespeare wrote the *Errors* he could read Plautus. No doubt he could just construe, but with pain and difficulty. If he could read Plautus easily, nothing in Latin would have been hard to him: why then did he not read Horace and avoid the mistakes in *T. and C.* from which knowledge of Horace's two *Epistles* would have saved him? He succeeded as a writer of comedy, but his great talent was for tragedy. If then he could read Plautus in Latin he could have read far more easily translations of Sophocles and Euripides. Their plays would have stirred up emulation in his exalted soul, but he knew nothing of them. To say that Shakespeare knew the classics contradicts the testimony of his contemporaries, and his friend Ben Jonson, and destroys the most glorious part of his merit. For how can he be esteemed equal or superior to the ancients when he falls far short of them in art, though he knew all that they did before him? But he appears their equal or superior by the force of genius and nature.

Also we must remember that he had no time to correct and polish what he wrote. He was an actor whose company lived in a state of competition with other companies. He had to act and to produce new pieces in a hurry. Thus, although he had naturally an admirable ear for numbers, he often wrote lines that are stiff, forced, harsh, and unmusical. These censures are not caused by want of veneration for the merit of an author of so established a reputation as Shakespeare. To venerate truly is to love and admire his charms and make them a chief delight—to read him over and over and remain unsated—and mention his faults, but to make his excellency the more conspicuous. To admire blindly is to show the utmost contempt for him. . . .

Here again the critical mind is divided between nature and art, and

the gulf is more impassable than with Rowe because Dennis is more steeped in the classics. It would be juster to say that there are two Dennises—one who loves the classics, and one who loves Shakespeare—and that he cannot fuse his two passions. His treatise throws light on the then state of criticism, which consisted not in re-creation, but in applying fixed laws to a subject; and if the two were incompatible the subject was worthless. Virgil-worship was the fashion set by Scaliger, and Dennis did not lag behind; but to his credit he was truly impressed by Shakespeare, and he did not mistrust his impressions. He admired Shakespeare as an unequalled tragedian and writer of verse and portrayer of character, and he boldly compared him with the greatest of the ancients. He was a true classical lover; and he will allow his classical fervour to master him, as when he imagines scenes in *J.C.* that Shakespeare might have written; but he does not speak of Sallust and Cicero and Horace merely to display his knowledge. The ultimate impression from his work is that he could appreciate the greatest things in Shakespeare, could lose himself in Shakespeare, and only number his faults when he awoke from his dream. In one matter he shows lack of true appreciation—his remarks on Shakespeare's 'poetic justice'. His critical manner shows him a progenitor of Hazlitt, and perhaps of Swinburne, neither of whom suffered fools gladly.

#### IV

CHARLES GILDON,<sup>1</sup> like Dennis, laments that to Shakespeare were denied those advantages of learning which knowledge of the ancients would have given him. The natural excellence of his writings would not have been spoiled, and he would have become a dangerous rival to the greatest poets of antiquity. He was a miracle for the age he lived in, but falls short of the ancients in all the beauties of the drama, though he surpasses them in the topics or commonplaces. And yet his most irregular plays can surprise the reader into so great a pleasure that he forgets the faults. His witchery proceeds from his characters and his reflections, heightened by the harmony of his verse, in which no man has excelled him. The learned Ben Jonson never reached his command over the emotion of joy, or his sprightly dialogue. He had a certain knowledge of Latin, and he might have learned to be correct from the ancients—the one perfection he wanted.

Poetry should copy nature truly and observe what is probable; and the rules of art are to show us what nature is: or how could we distinguish a true poet like Shakespeare from the most worthless pretender? *Nature* is an equivocal word, as it leaves every one to decide

<sup>1</sup> *An Essay on the Art, Rise, and Progress of the Stage in Greece, Rome, and England*, 1714.

what is natural, according to his fancy and capacity. It is absurd of Shakespeare to mingle grief and laughter as he does in his tragi-comedies. Poetry must have a certain standard of excellence, certain fixed rules, to save it from licence and extravagance: and all arts aim to benefit mankind. Poetry aims to instruct men by pleasure, and it must therefore obey certain rules. Aristotle laid down rules for drama; and the best Greek and Roman tragedies, and those of France and Spain and England, have followed them for 2,000 years. They are drawn from the pleasant and the profitable, and otherwise poets would please only by chance. In all that pleases, Shakespeare conforms to the rules, though his defects show that he knew nothing of them. Tragedy imitates a grave and entire action of a just length, and aims, by means of terror and compassion, to refine in us all sorts of passions. It does so by representing the miseries of those who have yielded too much to them. The essential parts of tragedy are manners and sentiments, whence action proceeds. The object of man is to live happily, but this is an action not a quality; therefore man is happy or miserable by his actions not his manners. It follows that the fable is of chief importance; but although Shakespeare succeeded in manners and diction he could not vanquish the barbarous mode of the times and excel in the fable, except in the *Wives* and *Tempest*. Manners are the cause of action because they discover the inclination of the speaker: e.g. Coriolanus.

The action, or plot, should not be longer than the representation. We do not want whole lives, and here Shakespeare is faulty. *J.C.* should end with Caesar's death, for a man's actions differ at different times. As well try to unify all the actions in the world as those of one man. The true episode, unlike the false, is produced by the main action: and in this our English tragedies fail. As to character-drawing, Shakespeare has excelled all poets, for he not only distinguishes his principal persons, but every messenger that happens to come in.

The fable of the *Tempest*<sup>1</sup> may be imperfect, yet is better than most on the English stage. It has one action, with beginning, middle, and end. There is perfect unity in action and time, but less unity of place. The manners are entirely just, and the sentiments the just effect of the manners. The faults of *Verona* are more of judgement than fancy. The manners offend: Silvia and the rest do not behave like daughters and sons of princes. The *Wives* is a perfect comedy according to Aristotle. It rightly excludes the marvellous and prodigious, and deals only with domestic and civil incidents and persons. Humour to the ancients meant the Ridiculous, and consisted in vices and follies of mind as well as conversation. In *M. for M.* Lucio's character is admirably maintained, like all Shakespeare's comic characters. The play has an excellent moral, being a satire against reformers who insist,

<sup>1</sup> *Remarks on the Plays of Sh.*, 1714.



against nature, on impossible perfection, and forget their own devilish vices of oppression and hypocrisy. The action is one, and the fable truly tragic despite a fortunate end: for it is thus with many Greek tragedies. The *Errors* is exactly regular, and proves that Shakespeare knew Latin. In *M. Ado* the fable is absurd, but the writing full of beauties. The people do not act and talk like natives of a warm country. The charge against Hero is too shocking for tragedy or comedy, and Claudio's conduct is against the nature of love. But there is such a pleasing variety of characters that you forget the absurd conduct in the excellent manners, sentiments, diction. Benedict and Beatrice are of the same nature yet perfectly distinguished. The vulgar humours of the play are remarkably varied and distinguished. Shakespeare errs in the fable, but draws men and women so perfectly that we believe their discourse is real. *L.L.L.* is his worst play, most lacking fire and strength of imagination, and what fancy it contains is divorced from judgement. *M.N.D.* has neither tragic nor comic fable, but contains many beautiful reflections, descriptions, similes, topics. In the *Merchant* Shakespeare, for lack of Greek, falls back on extravagant stories. The improbable and romantic plot conflicts with the admirably drawn Shylock, and abates our pleasure. Portia's character is not always well maintained, and she rather oversteps the modesty of sex. The writing, though beautiful, is calm, and does not touch the soul. The story of *A.Y.L.* is not dramatic, but Shakespeare has treated it as well as possible. The *Shrew* is indeed dramatic, and all action—only lacking unity of time and place. *All's Well* is irregular, and the story is impossible; yet Parolles is only below Falstaff. The underplot of *Twelfth-Night* is so interwoven that it serves the main plot indispensably. The Steward and Toby and Andrew are truly comic, that is ridiculous, characters. The *W. Tale* has the mistake of sixteen years' interval; but in the narrated catastrophe Shakespeare accidentally imitates the ancients. Had modern poets his genius they might follow this example and purge the stage from shocking representations.

The historical plays are not tragedies, as they contain no tragic imitation. They present lives of princes in dialogue, and mix comic and tragic, and, being histories, contain no fable or design. In *John* the Bastard and Constance predominate, but like all characters in such plays are directed to no end. The grief and motherly love and despair of Constance produce no single incident. The want of design in *Richard II* brings in many unnecessary characters, such as the Groom in Act V. Falstaff is the greatest thing in *Henry IV*, and he is best in Part I. Hotspur is next best, but, like Constance, he would have shown more in a regular tragedy. The Prologue to *Henry V* stands out in Shakespeare, and proves he knew how absurd it was to confine in one play kingdoms and lives and various actions. He might have been the

Sophocles of England, but is little more than the Thespis, or at most the Aeschylus. English tragedy lacked the religious foundation of Greek: only Shakespeare's genius added to it some unequalled beauties. The battles on the stage in this play are absurd; and the King's discourses with Williams, though good, are undramatic, and fitter for a philosopher than a king. Fluellen is well drawn, and so happily that when we laugh at him we value him the more. All the parts of *Henry VI* show the confusion of such a government under such a Prince. Richard III is too shocking for the stage, and Providence delays too long to strike. Atreus and Medea sinned passionately, but he is a deliberate murderer. In *T. and C.* Shakespeare followed Chaucer, and falsified the character of Achilles, making him and Ajax perfect idiots. Then Achilles upsets the balance by reasoning nicely with Ulysses. Cressida's character is too scandalous to draw our pity. The character of Coriolanus is truly dramatic, for his manners produce his misfortunes. Shakespeare seems to blame the people, but the fault is with the great men who presume in their pride to strike at liberty. As in *J.C.* Shakespeare presents the Commons of Rome like the rabble of an Irish village: but the Roman citizens were the soldiers of the Commonwealth. The whole of *Titus* shocks—and probably has only a few Shakespearean touches.

*R. and J.* is not dramatically perfect, but its latter scenes raise compassion. It has many beauties of manners, sentiments, diction, and the Nurse is truly comic. The garden scene is often improbable, but the fancy is fine, and nature so agreeably painted that we persuade ourselves it is real nature. The plot of *Timon* is irregular as to time and place, but the action is uniform. Caesar has an insignificant part, while Brutus is Shakespeare's darling. In the manners, Shakespeare is wonderful, for there is the likeness in all, and a perfect convenience and equality; and the style is plain, easy, natural. *Macbeth* is much esteemed by the million, but we cannot praise it here, for the plot is a sort of history, and Macbeth and his Lady are too monstrous for the stage. *Hamlet* is Shakespeare's masterpiece, though it errs in conduct and design. By judicious pruning it could be made to surpass the *Electra* of Sophocles—but all the comic parts dear to the million would have to be sacrificed. The advice to the Players teaches the whole art of the stage, and the grave-digger scene is full of moral reflections; but they do not serve the design and so have no business in the play. Lear and Cordelia should not have died—so we applaud Mr. Tate's version. A plot where virtue and piety are punished has none of the ends of tragedy, and moves neither fear nor pity. Yet Lear is a tragic character, neither supremely virtuous nor vicious, but made up of choler and obstinacy—pardonable frailties in an old man, but the causes of his misfortunes. *Othello* justifies Rymer's censures. It is against nature that a negro should be the hero, and a virtuous woman marry a negro

It excludes her from our pity; but Shakespeare drew men better than women, to whom he seldom allotted important parts. Here, and in *R. and J.*, he has done most—but he has not given any graceful touches to Desdemona. Only the temptation scene makes the play popular, though it is an open question whether Othello has adequate motives to be jealous. Iago is hardly a tragic character, because he is a self-declared villain. The numerous soliloquies where the dramatic person discovers his designs and temper to the audience are unnatural. In *A. and C.* seldom a line is allowed for a passage to a vast distance; and there are many scenes strangely broken. *Cymbeline* has all the absurdities of irregular plots, and smells rankly of romance; but there is something very touching in the discovery. In *Pericles* only the discovery is dramatic, and, however improbable, it moves strongly.

Gildon concludes by disclaiming the charge of partiality, and claims allowance as an editor who can seldom see a fault in his author. It is thought a poetical heresy to oppose Shakespeare, whom the number of his admirers assert to be the greatest modern genius. Nevertheless it is the beauty of order, uniformity, and harmony of design, that makes the Greeks supreme in tragedy. Shakespeare has many great beauties, but they are in a heap of rubbish: though a scholar like Dryden flatters him and exalts the moderns. The unnatural mixture of tragi-comedy existed before tragedy, both in Greece and Rome, till rejected by the greatest poets. The soul cannot pass at once from strong passion to calm; terrible emotions require time to subside before their opposites—mirth and humour—can succeed. Shakespeare's poems are much less imperfect in their kind than even the best of his plays. . . .

It is obvious that as a private reader Gildon admires Shakespeare, but as an official critic he feels bound to censure him. His mind is less flexible than that of Rowe or even Dennis; the gulf between theory and practice is more absolutely set. Dennis loved the classics for their spirit, but Gildon is more preoccupied with their form. Convinced that there are certain fixed rules which poetry must obey to save it from licence and extravagance, it seemed to him that Shakespeare achieved effects by illegitimate means: yet he did not deny that these effects at times were stronger than those of the ancients. All the critics, even Rymer, admitted that a poet's duty is to please—but he must do it in the traditional manner. Here, then, is the basal flaw of contemporary criticism—thanks to which Shakespeare's genius, though recognized, is treated in an apologetic manner. No doubt these writings were not circulated widely, and the real work was being silently done in the unconscious mind of the reading and play-going public. The masses were educating their masters—as we see from the popularity of *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*, over which Gildon shakes his critical head.

## V

POPE<sup>1</sup> finds Shakespeare the best subject for criticism because he is most conspicuous for beauties and faults of all sorts. He is justly and universally elevated above all other dramatic writers, and no author, not even Homer, more deserved the name of an Original. His poetry was inspiration indeed; he is less imitator than instrument of nature; his characters are Nature herself, not copies of her. Each is an individual, as in life itself, and no two are alike. His power over our passions is unequalled, and without labour or preparation. He is equally master of passions that move tears and laughter—over the great and the ridiculous in human nature. No less does he excel in reflection and reasoning. By a talent made up of penetration and felicity he hits on that particular point on which the bent of each argument turns, or the force of each motive depends. It is amazing from a man of no education, but he knew the world by intuition.

It must be owned that his defects were almost as great as his virtues, and he has written worse as well as better than any other. The reason is that stage poetry must please the populace, and he wrote to procure a subsistence. The historical plays had to follow old stories and vulgar traditions. Nothing more roused surprise and admiration in tragedy than unnatural events, exaggerated thoughts, bombast expression, pompous rhymes, and thundering versification. Comedy depended on buffoonery, ribaldry, and the jests of fools and clowns. Yet even here Shakespeare's wit buoys him up and raises him above his subject.

Neither the common audiences nor the better sort knew anything of the rules of writing, until Ben Jonson got possession of the stage. So far our authors had never thought of following the ancients; their tragedies were histories in dialogue; their comedies followed novels as if they had been true history. One cannot try Shakespeare by the laws of Aristotle. He wrote for the people without advice from the learned, and without advantage of education. Yet his later plays improved on his earlier; and also the standard of Players is not that of Aristotle. Their rule is to please the present humour; and Shakespeare's faults may be less ascribed to his wrong judgement as poet than right judgement as player.

It is untrue that he never blotted a line—since he enlarged *Hamlet* to as much again—and he was not without learning. He may not have known languages, but he had much reading. He had a taste of natural philosophy, mechanics, history, poetry, and mythology. He knew the customs, rites, and manners of antiquity. *Coriolanus* and *J.C.* give exactly not only the spirit but the manners of the Romans. His metaphors are drawn from the true nature and inherent qualities of each subject. In ethics and politics he distinguishes justly and com-

<sup>1</sup> Preface to edit. of Sh. in 6 vols., 1725.

prehends extensively. The opinion that he wanted learning may have been due to Ben Jonson's partisans, or to the blunders of those who first published his works and falsely ascribed some plays and passages to him. From one or other of these considerations the greatest and grossest part of his so-called errors would vanish. The final impression is that with all his faults and the irregularity of his drama, his works, compared with those that are more finished and regular, are like an ancient majestic piece of Gothic architecture to a neat modern building. . . .

We feel that with Pope appreciation of Shakespeare takes a leap forward. Though a correct writer in the narrower sense of the word he was above all a poet, and could not but feel, like Dryden, the true Shakespearian warmth. The result is that his praise overbears his blame. He mentions Shakespeare's defects as a matter of form, but they appear trifling blots on this new map of the world which the poet-creator has wrought from his inner consciousness. He defends him from want of learning by explaining the kind of learning that a poet needs. Rowe, Dennis, Gildon, present the ancients as equal to Shakespeare; with Pope we feel that he has surpassed them. That his inspiration more than compensates for his irregularity, is perhaps the last impression.<sup>1</sup>

## VI

LEWIS THEOBALD<sup>2</sup> confesses himself dazzled by the wide Shakespearian prospect, and knows not in how many branches of excellence to consider and admire him. The force and greatness of his genius, the extent of his knowledge and reading, the power and address with which he throws out and applies either nature or learning—all these awake our wonder and pleasure. His diction attracts us, but even more do the richness and variety of his images and ideas; and the latter improve even more when we see how properly they are applied to the characters. The characters are draughts of nature, infinitely varied: even clowns and fops come all of a different house.

No age can produce so various an author as Shakespeare. His education was at best but begun, and he owed all to the force of genius—to fire, spirit, and exuberance of imagination. Perhaps he owed facility in writing to his sweet and easy temper: as his employment as player gave him the advantage and habit of fancying the very character he meant to delineate. Yet the genius that gives the greatest pleasure sometimes needs indulgence: with Shakespeare we impute it to a vice of his times. His clinches and false wit were a tribute to the barbarism which then prevailed.

<sup>1</sup> A note of Pope's to *Rich. II* is of interest at the present day when much of the Folio is disputed. The rhymes, he says, throughout the play, are so inferior to the rest that they appear to be by a different hand, and the context frequently connects better without them.

<sup>2</sup> Preface to edit. of Sh. in 7 vols., 1733.

The question of his knowledge of Greek and Latin is one that should be treated with caution. There are certain passages that can be quoted from the classics not as proofs that he knowingly imitated them, but to show that he expressed himself happily on the same topics. Or they may be due to strength of memory, and those impressions which he owed to the school. If he sinned grossly against chronology in history, it was less through ignorance than the too powerful blaze of his imagination, which made all acquired knowledge vanish and disappear before it. Ben Jonson owed all to art, and therefore, in his bad pieces, we discover no single trace of the author of the *Fox* and *Alchemist*; whereas Shakespeare's wild, extravagant notes reveal now and then the divine composer. . . .

With Theobald the apologetic note of Rowe and Dennis has entirely vanished, and his praise is even more whole-hearted than that of Pope—a proof of the irresistible advance of Shakespeare's reputation. We are no longer uneasily aware of a no-man's-land between the critic's principles and the poet's achievement. In alluding to Shakespeare's historical inaccuracies Theobald implies that genius is a law to itself. Where he exceeds Pope is in attempted imaginative grasp of the whole of his subject. Pope rather concentrated on particular merits; Theobald endeavours to see each one as a link in the chain: thus he suggests that Shakespeare's imagination may have been stimulated by his player's duties, and he detects the working of the same creative power in his best and worst pieces.

## VII

SIR THOMAS HANMER,<sup>1</sup> dealing with the subject of Shakespeare's poor witticisms and conceits, excuses them because they are generally put into the mouths of low and ignorant people; and also reminds us, like Dennis and Theobald, that Shakespeare wrote for a rude and unpolished stage, and to please the vicious taste of the period. Otherwise he was a rare and singular genius who perfected two such different branches of poetry as tragedy and comedy, and equalled, if he did not excel, the best writers of any age or country.

## VIII

WILLIAM WARBURTON<sup>2</sup> laments that at first Shakespeare's works were so badly edited that they became encrusted with nonsense, and when the reaction came the nonsense was as much revered. Shakespeare knew human nature thoroughly, and gave infinitely varied pictures of it, so truly designed, forcibly drawn, and beautifully coloured, that hardly any writer has equalled him, whether his aim was to benefit or only please mankind. He used words licentiously, affixing

<sup>1</sup> Preface to edit. of Sh. in 6 vols., 1744.

<sup>2</sup> Preface to edit. of Sh. in 8 vols., 1747.

meanings of his own to common terms, and his construction was hard and unnatural because of mistaken art and design. But public taste was then in its infancy, and delighted in the high and turgid. In his best works he is often so natural, flowing, pure, and correct, as to be a model for style and language. It is easy to find fault, as some critics have done; but we must judge him by the laws and principles on which he wrote—nature and common sense. Nothing in literature is so important as that which lets us into the knowledge of our nature: only that improves the heart and forms the mind to wisdom, and Shakespeare is first in it. He investigates every hidden spring and wheel of human action with amazing sagacity, and is equally happy in communicating this knowledge by his just and lively paintings of all our passions, appetites, and pursuits. . . .

The imaginative touch which we noted in Theobald is absent from Warburton. He concentrates upon words, and his interest is rather in the controversies that have arisen round Shakespeare. He does not impress as a conductor of Shakespeare's genius. He praises his knowledge of human nature as if it were an exact science, and in the manner of one who likes to see his own opinions reflected in the author he is studying.

Throughout his notes on the plays we see his literal and prosaic touch. In the *Tempest* it seemed to him a hard task to make Miranda fall in love at first sight, because she had been stoically reared. Shakespeare effects it by showing her softened by her father's tender story of his misfortunes, and influenced by his charm. In Ariel's last song he alters 'summer' to 'sunset' because Ariel hated winter, like all fairies, and would use his liberty to follow summer round the globe. In *M. Ado* he extols the intemperate rage of 'brother Anthony' when he thinks his age and valour are slighted, as the truest imaginable picture of human nature. Only Shakespeare, he says, could have copied nature with such penetrating and exact judgement. He takes the line, 'Such harmony is in immortal souls' (*Merchant*), and alters 'souls' to 'sounds'. He insists that the line should read, 'The raven himself's not hoarse' (*Macbeth*), since Duncan's coming was welcome enough to make the most shocking voice harmonious. But, like Gildon, he admits that this play, however extravagant, has charmed and bewitched every audience from Shakespeare's time to the present. Truly the masses were educating their masters.

## IX

THE following year Thomas Edwards<sup>1</sup> published a bitter attack on Warburton, in which he ingeniously refutes the latter's note on the raven in *Macbeth*. He writes: 'The raven himself, whose ominous

<sup>1</sup> *Canons of Criticism*, 1748.

croaking is always hoarse (a voice of ill omen, and therefore finely insinuated to be disagreeable to the ear) is more particularly so when he croaks the fatal entrance of Duncan because Duncan's death is fixed and determined on with a resolution more than commonly steady and immovable'. But his best remarks are on *Lear*, and he warns the reader not to accept indiscriminately the popular character of Shakespeare as an impetuous and incorrect writer—instancing the curse on Goneril as unsurpassed for labour and finish by any other writer. It contains accurately studied sentiment, nervous language, where every word strikes and is exactly placed and judiciously chosen, and not one is superfluous. It is a sublime and magnificent passage, worthy of the highest and correctest genius of antiquity. In the character of *Lear* himself, he says, there is vast invention and consummate art. He analyses *Lear's* passion in a manner that faintly foreshadows *Lamb*—though it is rather *Lamb's* criticism of *Othello* than *Lear*. In the excess of *Lear's* ravings he detects implied tenderness—the disappointment of one whose affection is not returned, and he notes that *Lear's* piercing sensibility survives the ruin of the mind itself. With such a good start our interest is quickened when the critic informs us that *Lear* still has a reserve, that there is a yet deeper gulf of misery to be sounded. It is therefore disappointing to be told that mere collapse follows the death of *Cordelia*, and towering rage becomes sullen and unnerved stupefaction. However, *Edwards* has sounded distinctly, if faintly, a new note in Shakespearian criticism. He has not been content to unroll the official map and point to the well-known places: he has added something from his own experience and essayed to delimit Shakespearian boundaries by the guide of his psychology.

## X

PETER WHALLEY<sup>1</sup> admits that in a former morally decadent time Beaumont and Fletcher were supreme: but the present age declares for Shakespeare. There is nothing more astonishing than Shakespeare's genius and imagination, and he lacks no single thing which the dramatic poet needs. He has been reproached with want of learning, and it has been opposed to that extensive command of nature which he alone of mankind possessed. He was unlearned only in dead languages; and Ben Jonson, who had imagination but none to spare, and who relied on learning, insisted on this from policy. Shakespeare irresistibly commanded the passions, and had creative imagination, and rivalled the divinest ancients in dignity. His plots may have been imperfect and even absurd, but he expressed characters and manners in masterly fashion: and these, well executed, subserve the ends of tragedy more than plot. There is unsuspected art in his plays, both in

<sup>1</sup> *An Enquiry into the Learning of Sh.*, 1748.



his contrasted characters and the under-plots which contribute to the main design. He is equal to Homer in presenting beautifully those struggles in others between self-love and honour and virtue which we feel in ourselves: and it is the business of art to heighten nature. In characters and manners Shakespeare is invincible, thanks to his comprehensive mind and exact knowledge of the world. Each character is strongly marked with sentiments peculiar to it, and consistently maintained in action: those which appear alike, when closely studied, will be found to differ, and to be as distinct as in real life. He makes vivid all he describes, giving it lustre and polish, often imparting a more delicate beauty than the thing itself has in reality. A single line may contain the beauties of a whole landscape. . . .

This is admirable criticism, and should be pondered by those who say that the true nature of Shakespeare's genius was unsuspected before the romantic revival. Whalley makes it rather clearer than his fore-runners that the 'nature' for which Shakespeare has been praised is human nature and men's passions. His remarks on the characters as individuals, no two of whom are alike, have been made by Pope and others; but where he excels is in alluding to Shakespeare's creative imagination and distinguishing it from Ben Jonson's. His words carry more weight because he does not deny that Jonson had some imagination. Also, if not the first to recognize that Shakespeare did possess 'art', he at least points to instances of it: viz. contrasts of character, and an under-plot which helps the main design. But it is the last sentences which most import—the beauty beyond nature which, he says, Shakespeare gives to the thing described. It anticipates the grand critical discovery of the future: what Prof. Saintsbury calls the *dis*-realizing power of the imagination, and Pater, the power to surpass nature. Whalley's praise is that of the critic with poetry and imagination, who can combine them in his critical office: not that of the poet who must cease to think critically in order to praise.

## XI

CHARLOTTE LENNOX<sup>1</sup> in her dedication extols invention above all other powers of a poet. To produce necessary incidents from the clash of various characters, to make these surprising yet natural, such as delight the imagination but do not shock the judgement, and to wind up the whole in a pleasing catastrophe produced by the very means which seem most likely to oppose and prevent it, is the utmost effort of the human mind. Shakespeare's reputation depends little on plot or story. He was skilled in human actions, passions, habits, and chose tales with numerous incidents and characters in changes of situation. His works are a Map of Life, or the world in miniature, and he that has

<sup>1</sup> *Sh. Illustrated*, 1753-4.

read Shakespeare with attention will find little new in the crowded world. His characters are real men with human passions, not stage phantoms; and his reputation is therefore safe till human nature shall be changed.

*M. for M.*: Shakespeare has altered and added much, without improving on Cinthio, as he has not mended the moral, but shows vice pardoned. The comic part is all episode, and does not depend on the principal subject. Such crimes as Angelo's belong to tragedy, and Shakespeare has only tortured the play into a comedy by low contrivance, absurd intrigue, and improbable incidents. When does the Duke learn Mariana's story? Only since his disguise, or he would have known Angelo's bad character. He must have learnt it by an accident so convenient for Shakespeare's purpose that it offends our judgement. Angelo's treatment of Mariana proves him a bad man; but towards Isabella his manners are not those of a hypocrite but a good man overcome by temptation. It is the crime which troubles him, whereas hypocrites are concerned with consequences only: yet he kneels, prays, and expostulates with himself. Isabella is a mere vixen, an affected prude in her virtue; she should have reconciled Claudio to death by arguments from the religion and virtue she professed so highly. The whole is a riddle without solution—as intention constitutes guilt, and Angelo was guilty in intention. The title is wrong, as the play does not inculcate justice.

*R. and J.* is one of Shakespeare's most regular tragedies, but his own additions are injudicious. He follows the French translator in describing the apothecary's shop—a description beautiful and imaginative, but ill-timed and inconsistent with the circumstances of the speaker. Shakespeare's Romeo acts too deliberately in buying poison to carry to Verona. The death of Paris by Romeo, which Shakespeare added, is a mistake, as Paris was innocent, and his death effects nothing. If Shakespeare had known the beautiful original, he might indeed have excelled.

The story of *Othello* was ready for Shakespeare, and he altered little, except to make the Moor descended from kings. He errs with Emilia who, in his play, is Desdemona's friend, yet steals the handkerchief knowing how her mistress prizes it, and gives it to Iago on the very condition that should have made her refuse it, and then lets her mistress suffer rather than confess she had taken the handkerchief, which might have set all right. As to Rymer's criticism of Iago, we must remember that, besides a soldier, Iago was an Italian, and in the Italian race there is art, cruelty, and revengeful temper. With Shakespeare, however, he is diabolical, for he had gained his point by rousing Othello's jealousy and causing Cassio's murder, so it was wantonly cruel to murder Desdemona. It was well designed of Shakespeare to make Iago jealous of the Moor with his own wife, as it explains his revenge. Iago in the

novel differs little from the play; in both he questions and hints darkly and shows villainous art. Desdemona's irregular marriage was characteristic of many Italian ladies. She was simple in manner because virtuous and innocent, not foolish and mean-spirited, as Rymer says. The whole proof is the handkerchief, and the novel uses it with more art than the play, for Othello only sees it by accident in Cassio's hand. Othello is Shakespeare's own conception, with his wild uncultivated mind, like his climate—and his love frenzy, his friendship simplicity, his justice cruel, his remorse self-murder.

*Cymbeline* is an irregular play made up of three or four different actions, and Shakespeare has altered for the worse the one he took from Boccaccio. He makes the lady heiress to a kingdom, instead of a merchant's wife, but he preserves the manners of tradespeople, and so the whole plot is absurd. How should a strictly guarded Princess receive a foreign stranger from the very place where her banished husband resides? Also, how should she leave the Court and ride like a market-woman with a single attendant to meet him? These are a few out of many inconsistencies. Shakespeare errs equally in imagination and judgement. Her cookery! The marvellous drug! That she should mistake Cloten for her lord! Shakespeare makes a generous youth cut off his fallen enemy's head! The whole is more improbable than a fairy tale.

In *All's Well* Shakespeare has followed Boccaccio, but wrought out his catastrophe with more contrivance but less probability. After Helena's plot succeeds, she sets off to expose her beloved husband to the contempt of the King and Court. Boccaccio's heroine kneels, weeps, persuades—Shakespeare's is cruel, artful, insolent, and uses the King's authority to secure justice. We must take her virtue on trust from the Countess; to us she appears merely cunning and persevering: and the Count suffers still more from Shakespeare. In fact Shakespeare has followed the story but mangled the characters, and arranged incidents to make the two happy who deserved to be punished.

*Twelfth-Night*: Shakespeare used translations but knew no French or Italian, and still less Latin or Greek, or, being such a close copier, he would have learned the laws of dramatic poetry. Milton's 'native wood-notes' express him by doing justice to his vast imagination. Here Viola, a beautiful and virtuous young lady, resolves to serve the Duke, from no necessity, and throws off the modesty and reserve of her sex to mix with men in man's disguise. The novel reads better, where the maiden, stimulated by love and jealousy, tries desperate means to regain her lover. Shakespeare borrows incidents and takes pains to make them absurd. Olivia's passion for Viola is unnatural—noble and virtuous as she is, and mourning her brother. First she appears with the jester, then she bandies smart sentences with the Duke's page—and there is no hint of bashfulness or delicacy. Shakespeare would have

done better to follow the novel, where Olivia's original is a young libertine girl without birth or education, and likely to fall in love with a page. But in the inferior characters—all Shakespeare's—there is much true comic humour.

Shakespeare has taken Macbeth's character from history but softened it. He hesitates to murder and feels remorse after. Shakespeare has improved Lady Macbeth's instigation with all the force of words and propriety of character. Macbeth, deceived in the Birnam Wood prophecy, should not have relied on the other: but this play has fewest faults of the kind in Shakespeare.

The subject of the *W. Tale* is faulty, and Shakespeare has changed bad to worse. In the novel Hermione persuades Polixenes to stay and gives ground for jealousy. At the trial it is she who desires the King to consult the oracle. In Shakespeare the King sends to the oracle himself, and meanwhile treats the Queen and child barbarously. Inconsistencies abound; and Antigonus dies and the ship is wrecked merely for the story's sake. Shakespeare multiplies miracles to bring about events which chance does better in the novel. When Polixenes knew of his son's designs surely he could have confined him and not left him free to escape. Camillo is a double traitor, and self-interested, and untrue to his supposed character of an honest man. Besides, would Leontes who wished to be reconciled to Polixenes, offend him anew by protecting his son in his runaway marriage? Perdita's recognition is also worse managed in the play. The parties on the same ship never seem to see or speak to one another, and all the most unlikely things contribute to postpone the discovery till they reach Sicily.

Shakespeare took the story of the *Errors* from Plautus but doubles the miracle and gives two pairs of twins and the same name to both sets. He separates husband and wife in a most unlikely manner. She follows him simply to be delivered at an inn, that the story may be. Plautus makes the mistakes from the twins' likeness seem effects of chance: Shakespeare hardly ever introduces them properly. They appear on the stage merely to cause the blunders.

In *Hamlet* Shakespeare is to be blamed for a catastrophe where innocent and guilty share the same fate. Laertes is a subordinate character, yet he appears like Hamlet and also acts on the same principles. It diminishes the hero, and also divides our concern between them. Both act treacherously—as Hamlet does not propose to revenge his father openly—and both die in the same way—so there are two heroes. In the story, Hamlet's madness enables him to effect his revenge, so it is more essential than in the play. In the latter it rouses the King's suspicion and produces the same events by a blunder which might have happened without it. The best thing in *Hamlet* is his firm resolve to revenge—yet he delays till he is mortally wounded—and this gives something interested and personal to his action.

*Verona* abounds with absurdities in plot and incidents, and improprieties in manners and sentiments of persons.

The plot of *T. and C.* is but a succession of incidents. The love interest is quite detached and produces no worthy event. That the scandalous Cressida should not be punished leaves the play without a moral, and robs it of poetical justice. Hector disarms himself to be killed, Achilles is brave and a coward, a fool and a close reasoner! In the meeting between Greek and Trojan princes, the silence of Troilus is beautifully imagined. He went to see Cressida, but finding himself deprived of his mistress is struck dumb.

Shakespeare implies that Richard II had murdered Gloucester, yet in his misfortunes proposes him as an object of compassion. His inattention to history is less pardonable as the subject is a dramatic narration of historical facts and a successive series of actions and events only interesting as they are true. In *Henry IV* Falstaff's inimitable humour is Shakespeare's own, and he has much improved the Prince's character. The latter, in *Henry V*, makes an awkward lover, and though there is wit and liveliness and humour in the dialogue, it is so coarse and unfitting that the speakers lose all dignity. In *Henry VI* Shakespeare has exaggerated the amours of Margaret and Suffolk. It is absurd that she should lament her lover in public. The Talbot episode could hardly be more beautiful and affecting. To accentuate the predominant passion of cruelty in unsuspected persons, Shakespeare has often violated history and invented murders. His character of Henry VI conforms exactly to history. In *Rich. III* he keeps wonderfully close to the historian; and if ever he is to be blamed, it is for forcing us to applaud the valour and endurance of the tyrant in his last moments. But in no other historical play is the absurdity of crowding events of years into hours more glaring. Incidents, made up of distant events, follow one another without preparation or intervention of act or change of scene. Tyrrel tells Richard the Princes are dead, and is dismissed; and then Richard tells the audience all he has done in two minutes' absence. In *Henry VIII* Shakespeare places the character of Henry in the most advantageous light to conciliate Elizabeth.

The story of *M. Ado*, in Ariosto, was neither improbable nor unnatural; but Shakespeare has mangled and defaced it, and filled it with inconsistencies. By changing persons, altering some circumstances and inventing others, he has made the whole an improbable contrivance—borrowed enough to show lack of invention, and added enough to show want of judgement. In the original, a rejected lover plans Hero's ruin: in Shakespeare, Don John does it from pure villainy. To vex Claudio, whom he rather dislikes, he will ruin and kill two innocent persons. Injudicious change of characters have produced such absurdities. The night before her marriage, Hero would not make an assignation in a public place; and the degree of light that showed the clothes to be

Hero's would show the face to be Margaret's: and the voice would discover the cheat. In the original, the maid resembles her mistress in shape and stature, and her face is hidden by a veil which only her mistress wore—so that the contrivance is plausible enough. The incident of Claudio's new bride cannot affect readers with pity or surprise, because they are let into the secret beforehand and can anticipate the catastrophe. Shakespeare also deviates in character, and makes Claudio, who is supposed to be a hero and lover, mean, selfish, ungenerous, cruel. In the comic scenes there is much wit and humour, and the characters of Benedict and Beatrice are properly marked and beautifully distinguished.

In altering the story of *Lear*, Shakespeare has made it more improbable than the original. *Lear* suggests to Cordelia a motive for exceeding her sisters in expressions of love. Her nobly disinterested answer should convince that she is sincere, and has the highest degree of filial affection for him, since she hazards the loss of her fortune to speak the truth. *Lear* acts like a madman while in his senses. That Cordelia's future husband should be absent from this scene, shows lack of art, because he was to be most influenced by her disinterestedness. The victory of Goneril and Regan violates poetical justice, and lets one fate overwhelm innocent and guilty. Shakespeare changes history to produce improbable, unnecessary, and unjust events. . . .

Such criticism has only a historic interest. Mrs. Lennox emits a few generalities; she calls Shakespeare a mighty genius and speaks of his vast imagination and knowledge of human nature, and seems to appreciate his humour; but she does not fulfil the critic's duty of giving instances of these as modified by her own temperament. She confines herself to examining the plots—and, as she allows that Shakespeare's strength does not lie in plot-making, her criticism naturally consists in fault-finding. Yet, though we feel no creative warmth, it has historic interest. Between her and us lie the Middle Ages, or Ages of Faith, of Shakespearian criticism, when the Master could do no wrong; but the modern critic is again pointing out the external flaws, though with a reverence far deeper than any eighteenth-century writer, for he uses them to prove the depth of Shakespeare's inspiration. Antonio's danger and Hero's betrayal move us, despite the unlikely plots of the *Merchant* and *M. Ado*, because Shakespeare had a power over the imagination at which we can but dimly guess. With the details of Mrs. Lennox's censure modern criticism is inclined to agree, and to assign the cause to the quality of Shakespeare's audience—a fact insisted on by Pope and others, but neglected during the nineteenth century. Yet if Mrs. Lennox can only praise the Talbot scenes and the character of Henry VI, because they are literally true, her fault-finding has another interest at the present day when the presence of alien hands in the plays is suspected: e.g. the hand of Chapman in *All's Well* and *M. for M.*,

and of Marlowe in *Rich. III.* She alludes to the defective psychology of the first two, and the crowd and hurry of events in the last. She makes a good retort to Rymer, that Iago was an Italian as well as a soldier. Her strictures on Isabella, Helena, Viola, and others, show her unduly severe on her own sex.

## XII

DAVID HUME, the philosopher,<sup>1</sup> calls Shakespeare a prodigy considering the rude age he was born in and his scanty education, but as a poet who appeals to a cultured audience, he is less to be praised. He is too irregular, and even absurd amid his passionate scenes, though it may be true that his beauties shine by contrast. He strikes, like one inspired, on some strongly individual trait of character, but cannot sustain propriety of thought, and though he has nervous and picturesque descriptions, he lacks purity or simplicity of diction. His ignorance of theatrical devices does not affect the reader, but his want of taste—only at times compensated by his genius—is more serious. That he had a great and fertile genius, equally for tragedy and comedy, is beyond doubt—but that alone could not make him excel in the finer arts. . . .

The above also shows how straitly the classical yoke was riveted on the necks of the learned doctors; but the public knew better than its official guides and was absorbing editions of Shakespeare at diminishing intervals.

## XIII

HUGH BLAIR is a spokesman of a more independent kind,<sup>2</sup> who lessened the distance between Shakespearian theory and practice—though in the end he does not quite fulfil his promise. He starts by affirming criticism to be a liberal and humane art, teaching us to separate beauties and faults, and to admire and blame with judgement. Shakespeare's plays are admired despite their irregularities; the force of the orthodox beauties, which they do possess, has overpowered censure. He pleases, not by violating the unity of time, grotesquely mixing tragedy and comedy, strained thoughts and affected witticisms—faults due to the grossness of the age—but by animated and masterly representation of characters, lively description, the force of his sentiments, and his unique knowledge of the language of passion. Like Sophocles and Euripides, he touches the heart by setting before us the plain and direct feelings of nature in simple language. Hence his plays are the favourites of the Public, despite their many imperfections. In the midst of passion he is closest of all writers to the language of nature: e.g. Macduff's reception of the murder of his family. The extent and force of his genius for tragedy and comedy are unrivalled—but it is

<sup>1</sup> *History of England*: Appendix to reign of James I, 1758.

<sup>2</sup> *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*, 1759.

genius shooting wild, without taste, knowledge, or art—and we doubt if his beauties or faults be greatest. He has numberless admirable scenes and passages, beyond any other dramatist, but hardly a play that can be read with entire pleasure from end to end. Besides irregularities in conduct and mixture of serious and comic, he has unnatural thoughts, harsh expressions, obscure bombast, and play on words. But he redeems these by the two greatest excellences of a tragic poet: lively and diversified painting of character, and strong and natural expressions of passion. We meet true human beings in his plays, and also a world of preternatural beings—witches, ghosts, fairies, spirits, with a language of their own. . . .

Blair starts well by making liberal claims for criticism, but in the end he is attracted back to the classical orbit. It is disappointing to hear him say that no play of Shakespeare's is good as a whole, yet we feel that were his mind left alone with Shakespeare—apart from tradition—he would not be much troubled by his faults. He yields in the end to the hyper-critics, but he points out the Shakespearian beauties more definitely than other writers, and makes us feel that they are at least even with the defects. The word 'bombast' which he uses, recalls Dryden; and he speaks of Shakespeare's supernatural world very much as did Addison.

#### XIV

KAMES<sup>1</sup> estimates Shakespeare and Corneille as the two greatest dramatic geniuses of the world. He takes passages from *Lear* and *Othello* to prove that the sentiments flow so naturally from the passions represented that imitation could not be more perfect. Lady Macbeth is not natural when she prays to be freed from compunctious visitings, because the most hardened miscreant never committed murder without compunction. Yet Shakespeare excels all writers in delineating passion, either moulding it to a peculiar character, discovering sentiments that proceed from various tones of passion, or expressing properly every different sentiment. He fits his sentiments perfectly to the speaker's character and circumstances, and to his diction. If he falls below himself it is in scenes where passion does not enter, by artificially raising his dialogue and becoming intricate and obscure. We must remember that he had no model of dialogue fitted for the theatre, and also concede that he improved in later plays. It is easy to exaggerate every blemish of the finest dramatic genius the world has ever enjoyed, because his blemishes lie on the surface, while his beauties can only be truly relished by those who dive deep into human nature. He excels ancients and moderns in knowledge of human nature, and in unfolding the most obscure and refined emotions; and this makes him as great in comedy as tragedy. Abstract or general terms should be avoided,

<sup>1</sup> *Elements of Criticism*, by Henry Home, Lord Kames, 1761.



because images can only be formed of particular objects. In this Shakespeare's style is excellent—every article in his descriptions is particular, as in nature. . . .

Kames impresses us with Shakespeare's mastery over passion; and we are beginning to see that his genius is not the chaotic thing the orthodox would have us believe, but subtle and refined as well as strong. The unspoken appreciation of the crowd is filtering through a learned mind. The quietly confident tone in which he asserts Shakespeare to be the greatest dramatist of the ancient or modern world speaks for itself, but his strictures on Lady Macbeth betray the eighteenth-century mood. It is always 'nature' that must be copied—and the critic's mind is circled by a level wall that shuts out the distances of the imagination. He writes of 'To be or not to be', as an 'admirable soliloquy upon life and immortality, a serene meditation upon the most interesting of all subjects'! Yet he is the first to point out that Shakespeare is the most concrete of all poets.

## XV

ROWE, Dennis, Pope, Hanmer, Kames, all agree that Shakespeare was either the greatest dramatist of the world, or one of the greatest. Rowe, Addison, Whalley, Mrs. Lennox pay tribute to his imagination. The following subscribe to his unique power to draw character, and knowledge of human nature: Gildon, Pope, Theobald, Warburton, Whalley, Kames. He is a philosopher in the opinions of Pope and Whalley; while Dennis alludes to his great understanding. That he was a great inspired irregular genius, without art, is maintained by Rowe, Gildon, Mrs. Lennox, Hume, Blair. Gildon, Theobald, and Warburton commend his language and verse.

We deduce from the above that the bases of Shakespearian appreciation were laid in the eighteenth century. He is thought to be either unique, or at least equal to the ancients, as dramatist, poet, philosopher, portrayer of character. The most discerning critics praise his art and imagination; the less discerning censure him for want of art. The public, whose instinct was equal to that of the best critics, flocked to see his plays acted, and called for edition after edition of his works.

## Chapter III

### FRANCE 1717-1799

I. DE LA ROCHE. II. VOLTAIRE. III. PRÉVOST. IV. VOLTAIRE. V. RICCOBONI. VI. LE BLANC. VII. LA PLACE. VIII. MARMONTEL. IX. HÉNAULT. X. VOLTAIRE. XI. BACULARD D'ARNAUD. XII. DIDEROT. XIII. VOLTAIRE. XIV. LETOURNEUR. XV. BARETTI. XVI. SHERLOCK. XVII. LA HARPE. XVIII. CONCLUSION.

#### I

DE LA ROCHE<sup>1</sup> takes the natural French eighteenth-century view of Shakespeare. He contrasts French correctness with what appears to him Shakespeare's want of taste; but it is interesting to note that he recognizes beyond all doubt Shakespeare's genius. He complains that the English public forgives Shakespeare for breaking the rules—as if he were a genius above all rules. However, they are wrong; for although Shakespeare had infinite genius, he wrote at random, and admitted, amid many inimitable features, so much that is ignoble, that one may doubt whether the ignoble redeems the sublime or the sublime accentuates the ignoble. He has imitated no one, and drawn entirely on his own imagination. No rules can be deduced from his tragedies to replace those of the ancients which he neglected. He defies the unities of time and place, and introduces buffoonery into tragic and pathetic scenes. Instances of the latter are the grave-digger scene in *Hamlet*, and Hamlet's allusion in his soliloquy to the shoes which his mother wore at the funeral. Another general defect of the tragedies is that they excite pity and terror by appalling cruelties which should not be represented on the stage.

#### II

THE first time that we meet Voltaire is in his essay on epic poetry (1728). He lets fall the significant remark that works of art cannot be classified, and no definition would include the *Oedipus* of Sophocles, Corneille's *Cinna*, Racine's *Athalie*, Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, Addison's *Cato*, &c. Tragedy in England means action, and if to this English authors added a simple style, with order and decency, they would excel the Greek and French. Homer had great faults, and though his beauties surpass them, it is hard to think that the same person composed the whole *Iliad*. Corneille was at least Homer's equal, and though he stumbled, he never descended to such bathos. But the paradox of Homer's reputation is to be found again in England, where Shakespeare is called 'divine'. His plays are tragic monsters;

<sup>1</sup> 'Dissertation sur la Poesie Anglaise' (*Journal Littéraire*, The Hague, 1717).

they last for years; the hero is born in the first act and dies of old age in the fifth. You see witches, peasants, drunkards, buffoons, grave-diggers singing at their work and playing with skulls. The most monstrous and absurd things that can be imagined are to be found in Shakespeare. And yet an enlightened nation like England would not be deceived into admiration. They are aware of Shakespeare's faults, but they feel his beauties in spite of them, like gleams of light in profound darkness. Addison's good sense has not raised him to the level of Shakespeare. It is the privilege of creative genius to make a road through the unknown, to advance without a guide, without art or rule, to lose his way perhaps, but to leave behind all that depends on reason and system. . . .

Voltaire claims, perhaps with justice, that he was the first to introduce Shakespeare into France. It is popularly thought that he overpraised Shakespeare in the beginning and disparaged him at the last; yet the above reveals that throughout his long critical life Voltaire's fundamental opinions were unchanged. Shakespeare is great to him in spite of his faults; and Voltaire is as much aware of these in 1728 as in 1778. We see the liberal and impartial spirit that appears throughout the events of his outer and inner life.

### III

THE Abbé Antoine François Prévost d'Exiles,<sup>1</sup> author of *Manon Lescaut*, during his sojourn in England witnessed several theatrical performances, and expressed the opinion that they were inferior in nothing to the Greek or French. Were their poets more regular, they would even surpass them—and for beauty of sentiment, either tender or sublime, for the tragic force that disturbs the depths of the heart and excites passion in the most torpid soul, for energy of expression, and the art of marshalling events and bringing about situations, there is no Greek or French play to surpass the English. Especially is this true of *Hamlet*. . . .

This is the opinion of Voltaire and his age restated; but we feel behind the words the stirring of a poetic soul, who would gladly forget rules, and to whom imaginative pleasure is a more real thing than critical theory.

### IV

IN his preface to the edition of *Oedipe* (1730), Voltaire claims that France was the first modern nation to revive the just and necessary rules of the theatre. All other nations now preserve the three unities, and consider those times barbarous when the greatest geniuses, such as Lope de Vega and Shakespeare, ignored them.

<sup>1</sup> *Memoires et Avantures d'un Homme de Qualité*, 1728.

In his *Discours sur la Tragédie* prefixed to *Brutus* (1731), he admits that it gave him pleasure to see Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* performed in London; and though he cannot condone its barbarous irregularities, he is at least surprised that there are not more of these in a work written in an ignorant age by a man who knew no Latin and had no authority but his own genius. Yet amid so many gross faults, the sight of Brutus holding a dagger stained with Caesar's blood, and haranguing the people, quite ravished him. Antony then skilfully stirs up the people to vengeance. A French audience might not tolerate assemblies of plebeians and artisans, or the sight of Caesar's bleeding body. It is for custom, which regulates all in this world, to change the taste of nations and make hated objects give pleasure.

The Greeks, otherwise superior to the English, have often erred in mistaking horror for terror, and the disgusting and unbelievable for the tragic and wonderful. Art was in its childhood in the time of Aeschylus, as also in the time of Shakespeare. But if the Greeks exceed what is fitting, and the English present horrible instead of terrible scenes, the French err in being too scrupulous. They stop short for fear of being carried away, and sometimes do not reach tragedy out of apprehension lest they should pass its boundaries. . . .

Like Prévost, the poet in Voltaire has responded to the direct appeal, and he is honest enough not to deny that he received pleasure from an unorthodox cause. He is even open to be convinced that the French theatre may not be the ultimate goal of taste.

Writing on tragedy,<sup>1</sup> he says that the English mistake Shakespeare for a Sophocles. It is true that he created the theatre, and he had a powerful and fruitful genius, full of nature and sublimity, but with no spark of good taste, and not the slightest knowledge of the laws of art. Indeed his merit wrecked the English theatre, for he has so many fine scenes and great passages scattered among his monstrous farces that are called tragedies, that his plays have always succeeded on the stage. Most of his strange and extravagant ideas, after enduring for 150 years, have gained the right to be thought sublime. He is no writer to imitate; but only because those who attempted have failed is he considered inimitable. In *Othello*—certainly a moving play—the husband strangles his wife on the stage; and, after she is strangled, she cries out that she dies unjustly. In *Hamlet* we see grave-diggers doing their work, drinking, singing popular songs, and jesting on the skulls which they turn up: and yet writers are found to imitate this nonsense. . . .

These three years have witnessed a change, and we suspect the turning of the tide. The central position is the same, but the scale of Shakespeare's faults inclines slightly earthward. These are more present to Voltaire's mind than his virtues, and the latter are grudgingly admitted.

<sup>1</sup> *Lettres Philosophiques*, 1734.

## V

IT surprised Louis Riccoboni<sup>1</sup> that tragedy should start in England with every possible horror that the imagination can suggest, because a nation's drama reflects its character. One can see from their plays that the Greeks were violent and voluptuous, the Spaniards nobly proud and punctilious. Shakespeare presented the most atrocious sights to his audience—and yet the English are anything but cruel. They are gentle, humane, polite even—but excessively thoughtful. Consider the events of *Hamlet*: the five chief characters die violent deaths; a grave is dug on the scene and skulls removed from it; and the Prince handles a skull and moralizes on it in a way thought to be masterly. In *Othello* the Moor strangles his wife before the audience. The reason is that the English are given to meditation, and would fall asleep at a play without the shock of startling events. In their comedies they have a double intrigue to keep the spectator at continual strain, and they also admit obscene actions and speeches. The true terror of tragedy does not consist in bloodshed. If *Athalie* fulfilled her threat of massacring the Levites it would touch us less than her conversation with Joas. *Iphigénie* makes us tremble from fear that the father may sacrifice his child. The horrors of *Hamlet* and *Othello* cannot touch us like this true terror. Aristotle discovered the artistic principles of the Greek drama, and drew up the laws. The Latins accepted them, and the French and Italians confirmed them by their practice. To depart from them is to incur the censure of the world: otherwise one could not blame the singularity of the English. . . .

We see from Riccoboni's remarks on *Athalie* and *Iphigénie* that he has fine taste, and that he is true to the classical standard because he thinks it is the best means of embodying the soul of a play. It is unfortunate that he does not praise Shakespeare; but it is a pleasing touch of imagination that the English public needed to be stimulated out of reverie. Here we may note the antithesis of French and German; for had the thought occurred to a German he would have concluded logically that the English were a cruel race.

## VI

THE Abbé J. B. Le Blanc<sup>2</sup> assures his correspondent that Shakespeare, first of English dramatists, is a great poet. Selected beautiful passages translated into French prove this; but a complete translation would injure his reputation in France. At his best he yields to no writer, ancient or modern, but he often sinks to what is low and childish. The pleasure that one gets from reading an extract would be

<sup>1</sup> *Reflexions Historiques et Critiques sur les Différents Théâtres de l'Europe*, 1738.

<sup>2</sup> *Lettres d'un François*, 1745.

equalled by the pain of reading a whole play. His best things are in perpetual contrast with his bad taste: a fine scene is followed by an absurd one. For the sake of his fine passages the English forgive him everything; but we are less indulgent to Corneille. We reject any mingling of the powerful and sublime with the low and trivial. In the scene of Antony's oration Shakespeare's genius rises to its highest; and it is followed by the buffoonery of Cinna. And he, who describes life as it is, makes Caesar appear in a night-cap—and even shows us his characters drunk.

The greater part of his works are neither tragedies nor comedies but histories. Those who have patience to read them through will be compensated by occasional beauties. Shakespeare was a genius, and his worst pieces have a trace of genius. His comedy is always original and sometimes happy. It contains some good jokes, though more often pure buffoonery: e.g. the Falstaff scenes.

But where Shakespeare excels other English poets is in style. He expresses all his thoughts in pictures, and puts life into everything that he says. He speaks a language of his own—and this makes him hard to translate. If at times his expressions are sublime, at others they are extravagant: e.g. Portia speaks to Brutus about the 'suburbs of his good pleasure'.

In the last interview between Coriolanus and his mother, history is presented in too literal a manner for the theatre. Tragedy should exclude all that is common and familiar; and dignity is as essential as truth. A finer taste is needed, more of Raphael and less of Rembrandt.

In another letter, addressed to no less a correspondent than Helvetius, Le Blanc praises Shakespeare as the most original author who has ever existed. His imagination is equally rich and powerful: nothing can exceed the grace of his description of Cleopatra's progress up the Cydnus. His great fault is to paint everything that offers itself to his fancy, without taste or selection. Any feelings of sublimity that he arouses are quickly dissipated. Portraits worthy of Raphael are succeeded by tavern scenes like those of the imitators of Teniers. He is at his best in the Talbot scene of *I Henry VI*. Its matter and manner are worthy of Corneille, and it may be assumed that he himself thought highly of it because he wrote it in rhyme, and thus brought it still nearer to our own taste.

It is unfortunate that one who understood nature so well should have used his great talent in depicting the lowest things in nature, and that a genius almost universal should have ignored the rules of his art.

A sphere in which the English Sophocles excels is the moral. Throughout his works are to be found admirable lessons reinforced by striking examples: e.g. the dialogue between the King and Bates in *Henry V* and the gardener scene in *Rich. II*.

And yet Shakespeare never fails to mix the coarsest metal with the

purest gold. How unfortunate that he lived in a century where such a mixture was perhaps a condition of success! . . .

We should have been more impressed by Le Blanc's criticism had he not selected the Talbot scene for special praise and extended his praise to the rhyme. But for this, we might think that he had a fine intuition of Shakespeare's range and power. He pays tribute to his poetry and morality, and to his original and almost universal genius. He naturally belongs to Voltaire's school, and blames Shakespeare for mingling high and low, and for general 'bad taste'. To his Latin mind the Falstaff scenes are buffoonery; and it is also foreign to the Latin idea that an author should treat the common things of life as material for art. Yet there is a certain tract of the soul free from nation or fashion, greater or less according to a person's worth; and there is enough of the universal in Le Blanc to respond truly to Shakespeare.

## VII

P. A. DE LA PLACE<sup>1</sup> considers Shakespeare the inventor of dramatic art in England. He first gave it form, he who had neither models nor rivals, and who knew nothing of Greek or Latin. He drew on his own genius, or rather on nature which he was bold enough to imitate; and he was able to point out the road to perfection without attaining it. His faults were those of his age, and show clearly the point where he left it to adventure into the unknown; and it is only possible to recognize his faults by comparing them with his masterpieces. To dwell on his faults apart from the difference of his age and its customs would be to belittle him—especially if we judge him by the rules of Aristotle. His sublime ideas, grand images, fiery enthusiasm, singular and original traits, and natural sentiments, would be lost on readers tired by irregular scenes, or shocked by lack of probability. It is a French habit to despise all that does not conform to its taste.

How can we believe a whole people to be duped by sham merit? Shakespeare's fame has lasted for 150 years, and his plays continue to give pleasure. That his taste differed from ours should increase our curiosity to know his methods. A French reader should be more stimulated by Shakespeare's power and his new and original beauties, because they are strange. Shakespeare, as philosopher and artist, first studied his country's character and genius, and then its taste: he did not impose his own taste on England, but his object was to please. The character and genius of the people were opposed to regular tragedy; and his successors tried vainly to naturalize it. His object was simply to please; his audience was the populace; and he chose his images accordingly. This explains his choice of bourgeois characters for comedy—and the strange and supernatural events, far-fetched thoughts, and

<sup>1</sup> *Le Théâtre Anglais*, 1746.

thundering verse of his tragedy. Add that the audiences were ignorant of rules, and we get the condition of the theatre in England before Ben Jonson. Like all comedians, Shakespeare existed to flatter the taste of the people—and to this we owe his faults.

In spite of all he is England's greatest poet, and no poet has drawn more directly from nature. He did not learn art, but knew it instinctively, and is less the imitator of nature than the organ of its sentiments and movements. His characters are always true, and differ from each other. We seem to see reality, and their speech is such that were a play printed without names we would never attribute to one the words of another. No poet has held greater sway over the passions—expressed them with less effort, inflamed or calmed them at his will. We do not know how he moves us, yet it would be strange were we not moved. He commands equally opposite passions—touching off finely the buffoons of the human race. He excels in reasoned thought and reflection, always reaching the unique point which he wishes to light up—an admirable trait in one who did not know the world or the great scenes of life. But he knew the world by inspiration, and was as much philosopher as poet.<sup>1</sup>

And yet we stand aghast at the bloodshed and catastrophes of the tragedies. If he took this path to please the people, the English must be a blood-thirsty and fierce race.<sup>2</sup> But we know from experience that the English are polite, civilized, generous. And yet they need savage actions in the theatre to whet their curiosity—the sword, poison, torture, gibbets, burials, even demons! No doubt Riccoboni's explanation is the true one: and also meditative and melancholy persons are less apt to accept the illusions of the stage: study of truth disposes the heart against fiction. For the same reason frequent changes of scene obtain in England to draw the audience from its reverie by offering to its attention something new. Verse varies as much as scene; in an English tragedy the style is always chosen for the thing, never the reverse.<sup>3</sup> The gain is on the side of nature and variety, and it accounts for such scenes as the grave-diggers in *Hamlet*, the witches in *Macbeth*, the cobblers in *Julius Caesar*—also for music and songs and pageants. Many of these scenes hardly form part of the action, and exist simply because they please the people.

But we must put aside public taste and examine the essence of the tragedies. We must ask whether perfection really depends on rules. All rules may be reduced to *truth* throughout action and dialogue. Every character must act and speak only that which interests and moves the spectator. This theatrical truth is neither real truth nor appearance of truth, but a picture of things as they must be to inspire belief in the spectator. Nature, reason, and passion contribute to this

<sup>1</sup> Throughout this paragraph La Place has been following Pope.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Riccoboni.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Baculard d'Arnaud.



picture—but we even exclude those parts of nature and reason which are ill-suited to the dignity of drama. Dramatic truth would be injured, and its object fail to be achieved. Only when words and things appear real is the object of the drama fulfilled. Rules exist to concentrate all that can interest without shocking nature, reason, and probability, as related to place, time, character, and situation of actors and spectators. The first thing is to choose an interesting subject, and the next to remember that things do not interest people of different nations in the same proportion. But we have no right to think that we have perfected the drama, and no more discoveries can be made.

The English maintain that we lose much pleasure by confining ourselves to one action and a time limit of 24 hours. Why not multiply actions and changes of scene if pleasure is thereby increased? It may sound unlikely, but it is just as little likely that an intrigue should arise, develop, and conclude in the same place within 24 hours. It would be truer to represent things in the time, order, and place where they happened. A tragic writer works through illusion, and the latter kind is truer than the first.

Besides unity, Shakespeare has other liberties which do not offend against nature, reason, and truth of sentiment. Let us not blame the murders, combats, even burials, that we see on the English stage—provided that they are interesting and can produce terror and pity. If they are introduced needlessly, or do not suit the characters, or are degraded by bad verse, then we may blame: e.g. when the assassins jest during the murder of Clarence and then plunge his body in a butt of Malmsey wine; or when Richard III unveils in public his horrible nature; or Hamlet, against the truth of the sentiment that should spring from the situation, joins in the talk of the grave-diggers. Truth is likewise outraged when Hamlet, whose madness is only feigned, insults Ophelia and his mother, and pretends that Polonius is a rat so that he may kill him.

But it is the form of things rather than the things themselves to which we object in the English theatre. Tragedy should depict great actions or crimes; it is against its nature to mingle with it comedy, and bring low persons on the scene with princes: notwithstanding that such a thing may happen in real life.

Lastly we must remember that every country which has had a theatre has also had the same taste as the English—even our own. It may be objected that as we have outlived that phase so should the English; but the answer is that Shakespeare's beauties have eclipsed his faults, or he would have been superseded by correct writers like Rowe, Lee, Otway, Dryden, Addison. . . .

The liberal spirit that we noted in Voltaire is active here: indeed La Place is almost revolutionary when he says that the French despise all who do not conform to their taste—and suggests that a work

should be approached with disinterested curiosity. He even calls Shakespeare an artist, he attacks the unities, and is less concerned with faults than beauties. It is noteworthy that two of the faults—if they are such—that he discovers, have been corroborated by modern critics. These are that Shakespeare's primary object was to please a popular audience, and that he worked up single scenes at the expense of the whole. With the latter we shall find that Chateaubriand and Villemain agree; and though they lay submerged during the ages of faith, they have been revived in the twentieth century by Professors Stoll and Schücking.

## VIII

WE reproduce some comments on Shakespeare of Jean François Marmontel in the *Observateur Littéraire*, suggested by the translation of La Place in the same year (1746). He calls Shakespeare's theatre a country of mountains and abysses. *Rich. III* is the most unequal of all the plays, especially such a monstrous scene as the wooing of Lady Anne. *Hamlet* contains two interesting scenes that no French writer would dare to stage: Hamlet's interview with the ghost, which inspires terror; and the fencing match with Laertes. We know the foil is poisoned—and if Hamlet's character is as interesting as it should be, we watch every stroke with anxiety. Surely our poets should not exclude us from such resources of pity and terror. We are surprised to find in the same play rules of theatrical declamation that are just and tasteful: proof that what our actors ignore to-day was known in a barbarous age. Nature is a model for all time—and art consists in imitating her well.

Frenchmen who like order and decency will not prefer Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* to Voltaire's—though Voltaire, by his art, has improved some of the same scenes. Shakespeare has debased his art by admitting puerilities that a delicate mind would reject. Voltaire's object was to give us Antony's oration where Shakespeare unfolds all his grandeur and eloquence. The description of Cleopatra on the Cydnus shows us a new side of Shakespeare: delicacy and lightness, where before we had only seen power. We see that his mind could adjust itself to anything.

Climate<sup>1</sup> has been given as one of the causes why Greek tragedy differed from our own; but our climate is about the same as the English; and they have carried tragedy to a point of horror unknown to the ancients; either because their philosophy makes them cold, or the populace, which is the predominating audience, forces its barbarous taste. The delicate and sensitive French would recoil from the sight of a scaffold, and are scarcely reconciled to a dagger-stroke. As we dare not risk on our stage anything more thrilling than is to be found in the

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Staël (1800), St. Marc Girardin, Taine.

Greek theatre, we have been forced to multiply and prolong tragic movements so as to produce in slower souls the same degree of emotion. . . .

Here we see the two principles struggling together—and disinterested curiosity tending to gain the victory over formalism. Marmontel admits that he was moved by the fencing match in *Hamlet*, and he is by no means sure that Shakespeare has disregarded art in order to achieve his effects.

## IX

CHARLES J. F. HÉNAULT<sup>1</sup> attributes to Shakespeare true and touching beauties, but also coarseness and extravagance. Shakespeare ignored the proved rules of art in favour of nature. Nature could teach him how to depict passion but not how to observe the unities; and thus, although a great poet, his plays are like monsters. Yet they have a special use in the sphere of history. Acted facts have greater power than narrated facts. One reads and forgets the revolutions in the reign of Henry VI a hundred times; but Shakespeare sets the chief persons before you with their customs and interests and passions. You forget that you are reading tragedy, and think it is history, and you question why all history is not thus written. The result might be neither history nor tragedy—yet not the less useful or instructive. It would throw light on motives and circumstances, and on the morals which are drawn from facts. The example of Shakespeare might prove that all the 'kinds' are not exhausted. History teaches coldly by narrating, and tragedy depicts one action only. The union of history and tragedy might produce something useful and pleasing. Shakespeare's tragedies lack unity of action, but in interest of detail he is inimitable. *Henry VI* is weak, but his other tragedies are full of fire, heat, passion—and are equal to the best French pieces. In the same way, Corneille's admirable conversations are independent of all dramatic rules. If a historian, instead of narrating, would put facts into action, he would teach better, and better excite terror and pity. . . .

The accepted French opinion that Shakespeare was an inspired barbarian who 'followed nature' and excelled accidentally, is here restated—but we note the response to Shakespeare of an original mind. The outer barriers of the critic's mind, if not displaced, are at least moved—as we see from his question whether 'kinds' are fixed for ever, and his impression that the object of art is to produce emotion—and this can best be done by represented facts.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Nouveau Théâtre François*, 1747.

<sup>2</sup> Hénault's remarks on history are something like Carlyle's. In *Shooting Niagara* Carlyle says that Shakespeare's fact is more admirable than his fiction, and he might have made English history into an Iliad or even Bible; and in *Frederick* (vol. i, ch. 1) he laments that history is neglected by Shakespeare and Goethe and left to Dryasdust.

## X

VOLTAIRE,<sup>1</sup> though he admits taste is not a matter of dispute, and that nothing can prevent a nation from preferring its own poets to those of foreigners, is yet surprised that the English rank Shakespeare above Corneille, and Otway above Racine. And yet all lettered persons, whether Russian, Italian, German, Spanish, Swiss, or Dutch, know *Cinna* or *Phèdre*, while few know the works of Shakespeare or Otway.

*Hamlet* is one of Shakespeare's most popular plays, and we may think it strange that it still draws audiences in an age which has produced Addison's *Cato*. The reason is that chairmen, sailors, hackney-coach drivers, shop-assistants, even clerks, delight in spectacles—in cock-fights, bull-fights, gladiators, funerals, duels, gibbets, divinations, ghosts. They throng in crowds, and many noblemen are as curious as the people. A few touches of genius, a few happy lines full of natural power that imprinted themselves on the mind, have made the fortunes of a play. These beauties of detail Shakespeare has beyond all doubt.

Even through the medium of a French translation the genius of the English language appears. Its nature is to fear neither the lowest ideas nor the most extravagant. Its energy might be thought hardness by other nations, and its boldness incoherence. But beneath these veils one sees its truth and depth, and something which draws and moves far more than elegance.

To realize the difference in the taste of nations, let us now recall the rules of Aristotle—the three unities, &c. . . . Evidently one can enchant a whole nation without taking so much trouble.

In an essay which Voltaire added to his translation of *Julius Caesar* (1764), he expresses surprise that a nation eminent by its genius and its success in the arts and sciences should take pleasure in such monstrous irregularities, and continue to watch Caesar sometimes talking like a hero, at others like the leader of a farce—and also carpenters, shoemakers, and even senators speaking the language of the market place.

But it diminishes surprise to realize that most of the plays of Lope de Vega and Calderon are in the same style. Calderon's *Héraclius* shows the same genius as Shakespeare, the same ignorance, the same greatness, the same touches of imagination, coarsenesses, striking inconsequences, and mixture of high and low. There can have been no agreement between Spain and England to like the same subjects: besides, the genius of the two countries is utterly opposed. The first explanation is that neither English nor Spanish have known better things. Secondly, these strange plays have a basis of interest: the very first scene in *Julius Caesar* moves the spectator—when the Tribunes reproach the people for ingratitude. Thirdly, there is much human

<sup>1</sup> *Appel à toutes les Nations de l'Europe*, 1761.

nature, even if it is gross and savage. Lastly, people like to see spectacles—things passing before their eyes—storms, battles, drawn swords, bloodshed. Only perfected taste, like that of the Italians in the sixteenth century and French in the seventeenth, excludes all that is not well reasoned and soberly expressed. Unfortunately the genius of Lope de Vega and Shakespeare appeared in a time of unripe taste; and they corrupted their separate countries. . . . And yet a skilful mixture of the action of Spanish and English plays, with the sobriety, elegance, and nobility of French, might produce some really perfect work—if indeed it is possible to excel *Iphigénie* and *Athalie*. . . . Though Corneille is less perfect than Racine, and unequal and full of genius like Shakespeare, he stands to Shakespeare like a nobleman to a man of the people, with the same natural gifts. . . .

We see from both these extracts that Voltaire's hostility has grown. Of his liberalism we just detect traces in his remarks on the genius of the English language. Otherwise, with the passing of years, he has become more and more preoccupied with Shakespeare's faults to the exclusion of his virtues. It is probably true that he was concerned for the state of taste in Europe, not merely anxious for his own fame, as some have suggested: and his personal note is inevitable to the controversies of men of artistic nature.

In two articles in his *Dictionnaire Philosophique* (1765), viz. *Art Dramatique* and *Goût*, Voltaire recurs to the theme of Shakespeare. The first contains his famous comparison of Shakespeare to a 'Gilles de la foire'. Nevertheless, he continues, in the pages of this buffoon are to be found fragments that impress the imagination and touch the heart. We hear the language of truth, of nature herself with no leaven of art. The author has reached the sublime without striving for it. From Hamlet's soliloquy, with its contrasts of high and low, sublime reasoning and gross absurdities, we conclude that Shakespeare might have been a perfect poet had he lived in the time of Addison. The first scene of *Othello* contains some foul expressions: but this was the tragic manner of the contemporary English stage. Shakespeare could only follow the manner and spirit of his time.

In the second article Voltaire controverts the received notion that taste is an arbitrary matter. Persons can be educated except those who are cold in soul or perverted in mind. Addison is a useful writer on taste, and though he praised English plays above French, he was careful, in *Cato*, to avoid imitating Shakespeare's style. The failure of this play helped to consolidate Shakespeare's popularity. The vulgar are indifferent to perfect verse, and prefer ghosts and murders and executions. Corneille has insipid love scenes, but his best tragedies are infinitely superior to Shakespeare's, and he has never declined to Shakespeare's worst. His Caesar never speaks the extravagances of Shakespeare's; nor do his heroes make love like Henry V. . . . Voltaire

concludes that all but a small portion of the universe is barbarous, and taste, like philosophy, belongs to a few privileged persons. . . .

That Shakespeare has reached the sublime without striving for it is Voltaire's best tribute to the greatness of his subject. Otherwise, it is to be noted that he persistently denies all art to Shakespeare, and thus shows himself insensitive to some of the finer critical cross-currents that were working in contemporary minds.

## XI

F. TH. BACULARD D'ARNAUD, in a preliminary discourse to one of his plays,<sup>1</sup> affirms that the true beauties of drama come from noble simplicity. Nothing is simpler than the Greeks; and Corneille is usually, and Racine nearly always, simple, by contrast with modern enervation and impressions that do not stay in the mind. Shakespeare may lack the art of Sophocles and Euripides, but he is in many ways a faithful imitator of Aeschylus: e.g. ghost scene of *Rich. III.* The dramatist who can only reason is doomed. Reason may prepare the means, but it is the soul which gives life—the burning flame which makes them masters of the heart: and nothing strengthens words so much as the language of signs. Here too the Greeks excelled us: we see a whole people wearing garlands and carrying branches—or Hecuba in the dust weeping for her children. The object is to colour the drama with action, as Racine has done in *Athalie*, and as the English have done. Consider the terrible picture of Lady Macbeth walking in her sleep and wringing her hands, and the sublime truths which it suggests. The ghost in *Hamlet* beckons before it speaks; and it is through this expressive gesture and dark silence that Shakespeare informs his picture with all the tragedy which it can bear. By whetting the reader's curiosity he heightens the interest, and prepares the soul for passion's transports. 'Pantomime', well used, is one of the major chords in the dramatic symphony—when reinforced by vigorous and sustained verse. We should imitate our neighbours, and free our verse from its unfortunate uniformity. Shakespeare adapts style to situation, and makes his minor characters express themselves otherwise than his principal ones. . . .<sup>2</sup>

Baculard d'Arnaud is another liberal, to be compared with La Place and Marmontel. He is not ashamed to own himself moved, even if the cause be unorthodox. It is from the work of such hands that we see the crust of classicism breaking up, and the central fires begin to glow.

## XII

WE find little that satisfies in Diderot's Shakespearian criticism.<sup>3</sup> *Hamlet* is a mixture of tragedy and burlesque, dangerous to imitate.

<sup>1</sup> *Le Comte de Comminge*, 1764-5.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. La Place.

<sup>3</sup> Circa 1769.

He returns from a performance of *Hamlet* disgusted that public taste should be corrupted instead of educated. He notes lack of movement, speeches without action, situations that recur and compel the same dialogue. The third and fifth acts are empty and poor, and detached from the rest. We see a conspirator who only acts when the author wishes to be rid of him. We see a cold, useless love, producing neither intrigue nor interest, and indifferent even to its object. These absurdities are nothing compared with the fundamental one. Spectres no longer terrify, even if they did so in the time of Shakespeare. Besides, to make such a device last throughout five acts is to deprive it of terror and reduce it to absurdity.

It is rather in his article on 'genius' in the *Encyclopédie* that Diderot conveys some impression of Shakespeare's greatness. Genius, according to him, is force of imagination and activity of soul. It is a gift of nature, distinct from taste, the result of time and cultivation. Taste requires a work to be elegant and polished: genius often shows savage and irregular. Sublimity and genius flash in Shakespeare like lightning in a long night; while Racine is always fine, Homer full of genius, and Virgil of elegance.

### XIII

THE occasion of Voltaire's celebrated *Lettre à l'Académie Française* (1776) was the appearance of Letourneur's translation of Shakespeare. After condemning the ideas and expressions of the Porter's speech in *Macbeth* he proceeds to expose the anachronisms of *Hamlet*. The cannon is fired at the rejoicings of the King and Queen: yet cannon were not invented in the ninth century when the action takes place. Hamlet swears by St. Patrick, and calls Jesus our Saviour, in the time of pagan Denmark. Grave-diggers ask if a girl who drowned herself can be buried in holy earth; they sing popular songs; they turn up skulls. Hamlet and the brother of his beloved fight with fists in a grave. With the same licence, actors are transferred in a moment from a ship far out at sea to a spot thousands of miles away on land, from a hut to a palace, from Europe to Asia. According to Shakespeare, the summit of art, or rather the beauty of nature, is to represent an action or several simultaneous actions, lasting half a century. It would be vain to tell him that the Greeks found the three unities in nature, and that the Italians preserved them. All persons of taste feel the charm of difficulty overcome. Scarcely a painter depicts two different actions on one canvas.

The first scene in *R. and J.* gives us Samson and Gregory. There we have the beginning of a tragedy where two lovers die haplessly. It is one of many similar scenes. Whose method shall we follow—that of Shakespeare 'the god of tragedy' or Racine? Shall we prefer

Corneille's *Pompée* or Shakespeare's *Lear*? Compare the first scenes: i.e. Gloster's description of Edmund's birth. Compare also in Racine's *Iphigénie*, 'Mais tout dort, et l'armée, et les vents, et Neptune', and in *Hamlet*, 'Not a mouse stirring'. A soldier might speak thus to his comrades, but not before the highest in the land. Racine's line and those that follow are beautiful because they express harmoniously the great truths on which the play is based: but there is neither beauty nor harmony in this soldier's quodlibet. That a soldier should see or fail to see mice does not affect the tragedy of *Hamlet*. Rymer affirmed that Shakespeare had less taste than a monkey. Let us stand midway between Shakespeare and his translator and consider Shakespeare as neither god nor monkey.

Savage, low, unrestrained, absurd, he had sparks of genius. In this chaos of murders and buffoonery, heroism and wickedness, mixed dialogue of highest and lowest, are to be found natural and striking features. It was England's most flourishing age, but not yet an age of taste. A Thespis must precede a Sophocles; and yet such was Shakespeare's genius that this Thespis sometimes became a Sophocles. Through the drunken canaille that crowd his car we see heroes with the front of majesty. Thus in Spain Diamante and Guillen de Castro scattered amid their two monstrous tragedies of the *Cid* beauties worthy of Corneille. In countries and ages where the arts are least honoured appear geniuses whose lights burn amid the darkness. Their faults were those of their time, their beauties their own. Gradually taste was formed; and now we honour nothing that is not well thought out and well expressed. If learned men of England tolerate such irregularities it is because in a free country the people govern their betters. The age of Augustus saw the same savagery in Rome. One should not condemn an artist for affecting his nation's taste, but one pities him for pleasing that alone.

Voltaire's last utterance on Shakespeare is a further letter to the French Academy, prefixed to his tragedy of *Irène*. It is a reply to Mrs. Montagu, in 1778, when he was 84 years old. As usual he starts by praising Racine as the most perfect of poets, and he apologizes for his own tragedy of *Irène* as one of the degenerate fruits of his old age. The only merit he can claim is that it is faithful to the rules which Alexander's great tutor gave the Greeks, subsequently naturalized in France by Corneille.

Strange to say, the quarrel about Corneille and Shakespeare has been renewed in Paris. There are even people who agree with Mrs. Montagu—that Shakespeare is above Racine. Mrs. Montagu's book is written with the enthusiasm of the English race for certain fine passages of Shakespeare which have eluded the vulgarity of his age. She places Shakespeare over all by virtue of those passages which may be sincere and powerful but are spoilt by a kind of low familiarity.



French masterpieces have been performed all over Europe, but no such honour has been paid to one play of Shakespeare. A Chinaman might as well tell us that his country's plays of a past dynasty had delighted for 500 years; that they had scenes of mixed prose and rhymed verse and blank verse; that polished speeches were interrupted by songs; that witches came riding on brooms, clowns grimaced in the middle of serious dialogue, shoe-makers appeared side by side with mandarins, and grave-diggers with princes. We would reply: 'Act these pieces at Nankin, but not at Paris or Florence.'

Mrs. Montagu may be right in certain faults which she finds in Corneille, but she is wrong to blame Racine for making love the unfailing base of tragedy. Such condemnation would include the fourth book of the *Aeneid*. Racine excels all European tragedians in enchanting melody. To his great merit of moving throughout five acts he adds the even rarer one of harmonizing rhyme and measure to such a point that no single line or even word appears forced: but this difficulty overcome does not seem to appeal to Mrs. Montagu. To denude poetry of that which separates it from ordinary speech is barbarous. Pope has admitted privately that blank verse was invented by those who were too lazy or too incompetent to make rhymed verse: and to introduce into a tragedy whole scenes in prose is still a more shameful confession. The Greeks placed the Muses on the summit of Parnassus to mark that they can only be reached through difficulties overcome.

Voltaire concludes that he has spent a part of his life in popularizing in France striking passages of foreign authors; and he claims to be the first who extracted a little gold from the rubbish in which Shakespeare's age buried his genius. . . .

If there is a change to be recorded in this criticism of Voltaire's old age it is of degree, not kind. His thoughts underwent no revolution; all through his life his opinion on Shakespeare may be summed up as 'inspired barbarian', but at the beginning he was more concerned with the inspiration, and at the end with the barbarian. His mind moved inward, and he now searches for new examples to support his former theories—examples of praise for Racine and blame for Shakespeare. He even dwells on such a minor anachronism as the firing of cannon in *Hamlet*. We notice a decline in the liberal spirit, in his remarks on the unity of time: the Aristotelian rules are final, and the question is not even raised whether the heart may respond to an unorthodox stimulant. He still acknowledges Shakespeare as the genius of a few scattered great passages; but the word 'genius', as he uses it here, has a contemptuous, even an abusive, ring. It resembles the grudging admission of some critics of our own time that Boswell was at least a 'buffoon of genius'. We do not question his sincerity, and he is right to say that art is achieved through difficulties overcome; but it will be remembered that Carlyle said of him that he was adroit, not great, and

his poetry resembles less creation than a process of the toilet. It was Voltaire's habit to haunt taverns in disguise to overhear opinions on his plays. If his shade persists in haunting the living world surely it will writhe in fury at Carlyle's criticism.

## XIV

P. F. LETOURNEUR<sup>1</sup> describes Shakespeare as a genius who dared to search every corner of the human heart, who borrowed nothing from previous writers, but flew with his own wings. It would be curious to follow the first steps of his wonderful career, but he was unconscious of his powers, and has left nothing to enlighten us as to the circumstances under which he wrote, or any indications of the order of his plays. . . . His will shows that he was a man of simple character, and this adds to the admiration inspired by his works. Though his descendants are extinct his name is immortal, and also the memory of his virtues.

## XV

GIUSEPPE BARETTI<sup>2</sup> opposes Voltaire, and even doubts whether Voltaire knew enough English to translate Shakespeare correctly. Hamlet's 'To be' soliloquy is a quiet meditation, but it emerges from Voltaire's hands noisy and impious; and, judging by the result of his own miserable translation, Voltaire condemns Shakespeare. Into no Latin tongue can Shakespeare's poetry be well translated.<sup>3</sup> Shakespeare knew neither Latin nor Greek, but he understood human nature and had invention and imagination. These three qualities enabled him to produce a concentrated and forceful language, and a poetry that stirs the soul. French is too correct in the narrow sense to convey Shakespeare. Another of his virtues is to set before us types rather than individuals. With a grain of common sense Voltaire might have argued that a man, admired in England for nearly 200 years, had excellences which he could not understand.

In the short space of three or four hours it is impossible to make events, which lasted for years, seem real. An audience which knows itself to be in Paris will not believe itself transferred to Rome, Memphis, or Samarcand—or think it likely that a Macedonian king or Indian lady should declaim French verse. It is no real question of 'illusion', but of the pleasure of representation. Shakespeare pleased scholars, general public, and mob, and he worked this miracle by speaking a natural and universal language—a contrast to the artificial language of Corneille, Racine, and Voltaire himself. Is Aristotle right that there should be but one event in a play? Shakespeare and Lope de Vega

<sup>1</sup> Introduction to translation of Sh., 1776.

<sup>2</sup> *Discours sur Sh. et sur M. de Voltaire*, 1777.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Chasles.

successfully broke this rule. Aristotle had seen plays with one event performed with success, and he deduced rules from his experience. Had he seen plays with two or three or even fifty events performed with like success he might have attempted to trace the sources of the pleasure they gave. In fine, French plays satiate because they lack the variety of English; and *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* continue to please because they contain more events and characters.

Instead of dwelling on Shakespeare's faults we had better speak of his beauties—above all, his power to produce characters both strange and true. Caliban is impossible, yet he convinces. We cannot dislike Falstaff, because he has unfailing reserves of good humour, and he knows how to excel in cleverness without eclipsing others. As well compare figures carved in ivory with Michael Angelo's Moses and David as compare Voltaire's characters with Shakespeare's. It is well to admire Greek and French beauties, but the world has other countries besides France and Greece. Voltaire assumes indirectly that all writing which does not translate well into French is bad. There are certain native beauties, and what is admirable in one language may be ridiculous in another. . . .

Baretti sounds the note of revolt against classic tyranny, and adopts the modern critical method of judging Shakespeare by what he was rather than was not. He argues well in favour of Shakespeare's universal language and on the question of 'illusion'; and he gives reasons for rejecting the omnipresence of Aristotle. From the remarks on Caliban and Falstaff we gather that he argued backward from the first impression of Shakespeare's life-giving touch, though, judging by the care with which he separated 'illusion' from 'representation', we doubt if he is quite conscious of the imaginative basis of art.

## XVI

MARTIN SHERLOCK<sup>1</sup> describes Shakespeare as a writer who, notwithstanding great faults, has captivated for 200 years a whole enlightened nation. If Homer was the first of men, Shakespeare was more than man, uniting the best in every other writer. He alone makes silence speak; he petrifies Othello and makes him a motionless statue. Other poets have similes, but in Shakespeare the most beautiful similes are frequently lost in a crowd of superior beauties: e.g. 'an eagle in a dovecote' (*Coriolanus*). The image is a sentiment which can only suit that particular moment. His beauties are never superficial, but include a fund of truth which augments their value each time we re-read. Antony's oration eclipses the three great speeches in *Iliad* ix, and indeed all the most beautiful passages in Greek and Latin poetry. Demosthenes and Cicero were orators by profession: but is any one of their

<sup>1</sup> *A Fragment on Sh.*, 1786.

orations superior to this? The Roman people are drawn with exact truth, such as they are to this day: the same passion, the same violence in their emotions, the same readiness to be inflamed, the same disposition to act from impulse, not reason.

Voltaire has influenced the world against Shakespeare's 'monstrous farces'—but compare *Zaire* and *Othello*. Shakespeare created a new species, and his object was to fill the playhouse. He forced his sublime genius to stoop to the gross taste of the populace—as Sylla jested with his soldiers. The buffooneries which Molière added to his plays, Shakespeare interwove. Raphael did the same in the Transfiguration because he wished to be a cardinal: the two Dominicans violate good sense and the unities of time, place, and action. There never existed three men with more taste than Raphael, Molière, Shakespeare—and they have all erred against good taste. But they were not ignorant of it; they sacrificed it to the desire of making their fortunes. . . .

There is much good sense in this little criticism, and it has a strangely modern touch. The gist of it is that Shakespeare is great in spite of his faults, not because of them; and these faults were due not to want of taste, but to the fact that he wrote to make a living and had to please a popular audience. Between such verdicts and ourselves lie the panegyrics of the great nineteenth-century critics, but it is too early yet to say how much nineteenth-century romanticism has added to eighteenth-century common sense.

## XVII

J. F. LA HARPE<sup>1</sup> revives the charges of Voltaire, and starts on an anti-Shakespearian note. The French theatre, he says, was considered a national glory, when suddenly Shakespeare's translators claim pre-eminence for him and call all his works masterpieces. The dialogue of Antonio and Sebastian in the *Tempest* is chosen as an instance of nature and truth, but it is mingled horror and burlesque, a jargon: and all the scenes are in this style. He was made to succeed at the fair! It may be thought wrong to dwell on his faults instead of his genius, but his panegyrists make him a universal model.

*Othello* has the same faults as the *Tempest*, though it does contain some real beauties which keep alive the interest of the story. Desdemona's character is full of sweetness and *naïveté*, Othello's passion and noble frankness: but consider the parts of Iago and Roderigo! And the garrison intrigues and guard-house quarrels are unworthy of tragedy. All turns on the handkerchief: the facts are improbable and the means false. When and how does Othello's jealousy rise? Is it natural and probable? These questions we must ask of a man who may have known nothing of art, but must have felt natural feelings. As a

<sup>1</sup> *De Sh.*, 1799.

real instance of human nature compare the scene at the Mosque between Orosmane and Zaïre. Desdemona has left all to follow Othello, so that if ever a man could count on a woman's love it is here. Against it are required proofs clear as day: and only with a man who already suspected his wife could Iago's clumsy artifice have prevailed. Othello is represented as frank, honourable, and unsuspecting, and in the first intoxication of love for Desdemona who has left all and followed him to Cyprus. Now he believes everything, and never asks why Iago did not previously tell him of this intrigue. Jealousy must have something to seize upon—and he is said to be not naturally jealous. Is this Shakespeare's knowledge of human nature?

The last dialogue between Othello and Desdemona has the cold conceits of a bad Italian sonnet—the absurd declamations called truth and nature. Except Desdemona, and Othello at times, every character speaks a jargon loaded with figures in the manner of the people, or one childishly laboured like bad rhetoricians. Is it thus with Narcissus when he wishes to deceive Nero? One or two scenes may be compared with *Zaïre*, but as a rule they are as unlike as the styles of their authors. Is there no passage where Shakespeare may stand comparison? It is difficult to quote what is praiseworthy, because the few touches of truth and passion are surrounded by bad taste. One cannot transcribe a dozen lines without conflicting with this obstacle, and without fearing that readers, accustomed to our excellent writers, will exclaim: 'Do you dare compare them to this?' After Othello kills Desdemona, for instance, he speaks of the sword that he wears upon his 'thigh'. The sense could have been rendered equally well without mention of this word, which, for delicate French ears, would spoil the finest phrase. In the passage where Othello speaks of Desdemona as a place for foul animals to gender in, he mixes the false, disgusting, and ridiculous. The scene which displays true knowledge of the human heart is where Othello explains to the senate how he won Desdemona.

Between *Othello* and *Zaïre* is the gulf that is set between a repulsive farce fit to be played at a fair, but with a few passages of truth and interest, and one of the most impressive masterpieces which the art of a long civilized people has produced. Shakespeare's worshippers and Voltaire's detractors say that Orosmane is jealous without cause. To assume that jealousy is always puerile and uncalled for is to show deep ignorance of the human heart—to forget that it arises from the anxiety natural to love, and is self-torturing.

When we recall Caesar's speech on danger, and consider that Othello and all Shakespeare's heroes talk this tavern language, then we can truly say: 'This is not nature: Caesar cannot have spoken thus.' Compare Ariane to Thésée: 'Plus de ressentiment de ton crime passé; Tu n'as qu'à dire un mot, ce crime est effacé; Tu le vois, c'en est fait, je n'ai plus de colère.' This is the language of nature; and the Alexan-

drine verse, rhyme, and hemistich add charm and music, and do not detract from truth. Brutus's speech to the people after killing Caesar is fine in all languages. Shakespeare's numerous defects do not destroy his real beauties; but he adapted himself to the coarseness and ignorance of his age, and therefore is no model for our own cultured age. He did not create art because his audience did not require it, and he himself knew nothing of art. Mrs. Montagu praises Shakespeare for painting every condition of life. Molière has painted a great many, but an artist should consider carefully whether all objects alike are worthy to be painted. Shakespeare has broken every rule, and his portraiture is often untrue to nature, fantastic, and a caricature. It is not small perfections, but a perfect whole that we require. What Shakespeare does is to show character in action, though often at the expense of the true and the fitting. He has a savage kind of energy which pleases at times, and his plays at least interest as they develop. But to adopt him as a model would bring Bedlam and Tyburn on the French stage. . . .

La Harpe has added little to Voltaire's censures, and the interest of his criticism is psychological rather than literary, negative rather than positive. If there exist men of learning and taste in the world who cannot appreciate Shakespeare, and therefore prove indirectly that his genius was not absolutely universal, here is a specimen. We naturally ask the reason, and we divine it to be the realistic basis of the critic's mind, added to which is a genuine, though limited, delicacy which makes some of Shakespeare's methods repellent to him. He presents the contrast of the highest intellectual culture of his age with the lowest degree of imagination. He is most at home in the region of fact: he asks why Iago had not previously informed Othello of the intrigue; he reminds us that jealousy arises from the anxiety natural to love; he uses the terribly concrete images of Bedlam and Tyburn. He stands like a critical rock unwashed by the sea of imagination; and it is the more remarkable because the tide was rising. We see reflected in the pages of the French and English aesthetic critics of the eighteenth century the developing popular imagination. Mr. Lytton Strachey has recently told us how Essex's nature changed as he advanced into Ireland and felt the soft climatic influences;<sup>1</sup> and so the reader is lured on by Shakespeare's spell till facts are softened, and he only half understands that the handkerchief-plot of *Othello* is improbable, or that Antonio, with his friends and credit, might have raised thrice the sum.

## XVIII

DE LA ROCHE, Voltaire, Le Blanc, Baretti hail Shakespeare as a universal genius. Voltaire calls him a great, uncontrolled, adventurous genius, great despite his faults. The faults are most emphasized by

<sup>1</sup> *Elizabeth and Essex*, 1928.

Voltaire and La Harpe; and to Voltaire's repeated charges of lack of art and bad taste, La Harpe adds extravagance, improbability, and caricature instead of portrait-painting. Voltaire's saying that his language was that of truth and nature herself with no leaven of art is a half contradiction; and, on the other side, are Le Blanc and La Place. The one says that he excels in style, the other calls him both philosopher and artist; while Marmontel, to his grandeur and eloquence, adds delicacy and lightness.<sup>6</sup> Le Blanc, Hénault, Sherlock subscribe to his moral force; Le Blanc and Sherlock call him the greatest of all poets. Except La Harpe, opinion is practically unanimous on his power to draw characters, and knowledge of human nature and the passions.

We thus find considerable agreement between French eighteenth-century criticism and English, where we left it in 1761. On one side, praise qualified by blame for artistic shortcomings: on the other, intuitions from a few subtler critics that among his excellences may be a finer art than the world has yet suspected. We note that a school of critics, headed by Pope in England and Voltaire in France, stress the fact that Shakespeare neglected art because he wrote for an ignorant audience. We also note that certain French critics, such as La Place and Baretti, repudiate the right of their country to impose on the rest of the world a narrow French standard of taste.

## Chapter IV

### ENGLAND 1765-1777

I. JOHNSON. II. KENRICK. III. FARMER. IV. MONTAGU. V. STEEVENS.  
VI. TAYLOR. VII. KENRICK. VIII. WARTON. IX. GRIFFITH. X. MORGANN.  
XI. CONCLUSION.

#### I

IT is always pleasant to meet Dr. Johnson in the critical fields, and little of his work has surpassed his Shakespearian preface.<sup>1</sup> He says in the beginning that men are more willing to honour past than present excellence, and the tendency now is to find the faults of the moderns and the beauties of the ancients. Time is the only test because it allows many comparisons: as in nature, no man can call a river deep or a mountain high till he has seen many mountains and rivers. Shakespeare has now begun to assume the dignity of an ancient, and to claim the privilege of an established fame. He has outlived his century, and all local interests; he is read for pleasure and praised in so far as he gives it. Only just representations of general nature can please many and please long; and Shakespeare is above all modern writers the poet of nature who holds up to his readers a faithful mirror of manners and life. The passions and principles which move his persons to act and speak are those universal ones which also move the whole system of life; and his characters are species rather than individuals. His power is not from particular passages, but from the progress of the fable and tenor of the dialogue. The characters of other dramatists speak a language never heard outside the theatre. Shakespeare's dialogue is so easy and simple that it seems more like common conversation than fiction. Modern dramatists exalt love, and therefore violate probability and misrepresent life. Love is only one of the passions, and influences little the sum of life; it therefore does not predominate in Shakespeare who caught his ideas from the living world. To discriminate ample and general characters is not easy, yet no poet has kept his persons more distinct from each other. He has no heroes; but his characters act and speak as the reader thinks he would act and speak; and even where the agency is supernatural the dialogue is level with life. He approximates the remote and familiarizes the wonderful. His drama is the mirror of life.

Nature predominates over accident; his story may require Romans or kings, but he gives men. He has been blamed for mixing comic and tragic: but there is always the appeal to nature. The mingled drama can instruct as much as both tragedy and comedy because it approaches nearer to life. The interchanges of mingled scenes produce the intended vicissitudes of passion, and all pleasure consists in variety.

<sup>1</sup> Preface to edit. of Sh., 1765.



His disposition led him to comedy, which he produced easily, whereas his tragedy appears strained and laboured. In the latter he seems to seek occasions to be comic; in comedy he luxuriates in a congenial way of thinking. His tragedy is skill, his comedy instinct. Time has not injured his comic scenes, because the characters are moved by genuine passion. His style belongs to the common intercourse of life—to the level above grossness and below refinement—where propriety resides, and is therefore permanent.

He has faults sufficient to overwhelm any other merit. He takes more care to please than instruct, and seems to write without moral purpose. Of course he who thinks reasonably must think morally; but Shakespeare's precepts drop casually from him, and he does not distribute good or evil justly. He carries his principles indifferently through right and wrong, and leaves their examples to operate by chance. This is not the fault of his age, for it is a writer's duty to make the world better, and justice does not depend on time or place. His plots are often loosely formed; he omits chances of instructing or delighting; and towards the end of his work he will at times shorten the labour to snatch the profit—to the injury of the catastrophe. He violates chronology, his jests are gross, and his ladies and gentlemen have little delicacy. In tragedy, except for effusions of passion, he is tumid, mean, tedious, and obscure, lacking brevity in narration, and with a wearisome train of circumlocution. His set speeches are cold and weak, he often applies words to things unequally, and gives sonorous epithets to trivial sentiments—and at highest moments will interpose an idle conceit. Terror and pity as they rise in the mind will be checked and blasted by sudden frigidity. He will always turn aside to pursue a quibble.

His histories are not subject to the law of unity, as they are neither tragedies nor comedies; but in his other works he preserves unity of action, having beginning, middle, and end. He neglects unities of time and place, which were supposed to make a play credible, but no representation is really mistaken for reality, and one need only imagine a little more. The spectators are always in their senses, but delusion has no certain limitations—so the same space, without absurdity, may be allowed to be first Athens, then Sicily, which is neither, but a modern theatre: and so with time. A drama is thought to be a just picture of a real original: that which an auditor would feel if exposed to such evils. We rather lament that misery is possible than suppose it to be present. Imitations bring realities to mind but are not mistaken for them. We may suspect that Shakespeare was much advised by scholars and critics, but that he deliberately persisted in his practice. Only unity of action is essential to the fable, not unities of time and place; therefore the latter may be sacrificed to the nobler beauties of variety and instruction. The greatest thing a play can do is to copy nature and instruct life.

We must remember that England in Shakespeare's day was just emerging from barbarism. Shakespeare's audiences demanded not the common occurrences of the world, but strange events and fabulous transactions. He crowded his plots with incidents, and excelled all but Homer in effecting a writer's first purpose—that of exciting restless and unquenchable curiosity. He knew also that his audience preferred action to poetical declamation. Addison speaks the language of poets, Shakespeare of men. *Cato* is a faultless work, but does not make the heart vibrate; whereas *Othello* is the vigorous offspring of observation impregnated by genius. In the way of learning he probably read many translations, but little more than English; and though his knowledge was great it was not such as books supply. His own genius produced the greater part of his excellence. He transformed the English stage, and practically introduced and perfected both character and dialogue.

The extreme vigilance of observation and accuracy of distinction cannot be won from books. Shakespeare looked directly and attentively on mankind. He came to London a needy adventurer, and lived in mean circumstances, but his genius triumphed. He obtained an exact knowledge of many modes of life and dispositions: these he varied and distinguished and combined. He had no one to imitate, and has been imitated by all who came after. He also exactly surveyed the inanimate world, and contemplated things as they really exist. In life and nature he saw with his own eyes, and gives the image which he receives, unweakened by the intervention of any other mind. He and Spenser were the first to soften and harmonize the English language. Yet it must be admitted that much praise is lavished upon him because of custom and veneration. He has corrupted language, and, despite undoubted excellent scenes, probably not one of his plays, were it by a contemporary author, would now be heard to the end. He had no wish for fame, or hoped more than that his plays should be acted. He would therefore repeat the same jests in many dialogues, and entangle different plots by the same knot of perplexity. He made no collection of his works; and the few plays which appeared in his lifetime were thrust into the world without his care or knowledge. . . .

The remainder of Johnson's preface is occupied with remarks on the corrupt state of Shakespeare's text, and his own methods of editing, and those of his predecessors. He is neutral to Rowe, praises Pope's preface, but remarks that he neglected 'the dull duty of an editor'—that of collating. He calls Theobald 'weak and ignorant, mean and faithless, petulant and ostentatious'. He praises Hanmer's intuition, which enabled him to discover the poet's intention. He is respectful to Warburton, but admits that 'his notes exhibit sometimes perverse interpretations, and sometimes improbable conjectures'.

Johnson's preface is a fine piece of work because it gives scope for his greatest quality—his strong common sense. That he could not

isolate his aesthetic from his moral impressions was a fault, yet he did not deny his aesthetic impressions. It seemed to him that Shakespeare wrote in order to please, and succeeded—and that he himself had received much pleasure from reading Shakespeare. He therefore brings his common sense to bear upon the causes, and by means of it determines the reasons for Shakespeare's survival, and dissipates the objections to tragi-comedy and neglect of the unities. Aesthetic appreciation is not lacking, but it takes a secondary place, having been called in to serve as handmaid to common sense. The essay pleases because it expresses the whole, rather than the intellect only, of Johnson, and therefore borders upon his conversation, in which, as we know, he excelled, rather than in his writing. This was his special contribution; but where he failed was, in the manner of his century, in judging the drama as a game, and Shakespeare according to the skill with which he observed its rules, rather than his power to unveil a mystery. The emotion of awe is lacking, except in side-impressions dealing with those moral questions which he thinks that Shakespeare mishandled. They will appear as we glance through his notes, but neither with them, nor his remark that Shakespeare's comedy excelled his tragedy, is the modern reader likely to agree.

He comments indignantly on the Friar's words in *M. for M.*: 'Thy best of rest is sleep.' To imply that death is sleep, he says, is impious in the Friar, foolish in the reasoner, and trite and vulgar in the poet. The story of the *Merchant* appears to him improbable. Aguecheek's character (*Twelfth-Night*) is drawn with great propriety, but is one of natural fatuity, and therefore not the satirist's proper prey. Olivia's marriage is well enough for the stage, but incredible, and cannot instruct as the drama should, as it exhibits no just picture of life. He has an admirable sentence on the 'hero' of *All's Well*: 'I cannot reconcile my heart to Bertram; a man noble without generosity, and young without truth; who marries Helena as a coward, and leaves her as a profligate: when she is dead by his unkindness, sneaks home to a second marriage, is accused by a woman whom he has wronged, defends himself by falsehood, and is dismissed to happiness.'

He does not pity rejected Falstaff, because he has uttered no generous sentiment, and though he excites mirth has nothing in him to be esteemed, so it costs little pain to think he must live honestly, maintained by the king, with a chance of advancement: yet, with all his vices, he has the most pleasing of all qualities, perpetual gaiety, and unflinching power to excite laughter. He finds that, apart from characters and incidents, as narratives in verse, the three *Henry VI* plays are more happily conceived and accurately finished than *John*, *Richard II*, or the tragic scenes of *Henry IV* and *Henry V*. His saying on *Henry VIII* is famous—that Shakespeare's genius comes in and goes out with Queen Katherine.

As a passive reader he felt the power of *Lear*, and he says that no play so strongly fixes the attention, agitates the passions, and interests the curiosity. As critic he recognizes how 'the artful involutions of distinct interests, the striking opposition of contrary characters, the sudden changes of fortune, and the quick succession of events, fill the mind with a perpetual tumult of indignation, pity, and hope'. Every scene helps the conduct of the main action, and every line the progress of the scene. He deplores the death of Cordelia, and admits that it so shocked him years ago that he could not bear to re-read those scenes till he prepared the present edition. The witch scenes in *Macbeth*, he says, would now be censured as improbable; and he joins in the dispute about the raven's hoarseness, against Warburton. The messenger was out of breath, and the lady answers mentally that this may well be, as such a message would add hoarseness to the raven. The final criticism that the events are too great to allow nice discrimination of character is partially true of the minor characters, but not of the hero and heroine. Of the latter, he says, that Lady Macbeth is merely detested, and that we welcome Macbeth's fall, despite his courage.

*A. and C.* pleases him by its frequent changes of scene: but to say that Antony's diction is not distinguished from the others is indeed a blot on his critical scutcheon. *Cymbeline* strikes him as incongruous, and he concludes: 'To remark the folly of the fiction, the absurdity of the conduct, the confusion of the names and manners of different times, and the impossibility of the events in any system of life were to waste criticism upon unresisting imbecility, upon faults too evident for detection, and too gross for aggravation.' *T. and C.* is more correctly written than most of Shakespeare's plays, and the characters well diversified; but neither his philosophy nor his invention are at their best. Polonius is well described as 'a man bred in courts, exercised in business, stored with observation, confident of his knowledge, proud of his eloquence, and declining into dotage'. He is 'confident because he knows that his mind was once strong, and knows not that it is become weak. Such a man excels in general principles, but fails in the particular application'. The catastrophe of *Hamlet*, according to Johnson, is not happily produced by exchange of weapons. The Ghost's mission failed, since revenge was only obtained by the death of him who was required to take it; and the gratification of destroying a usurper and murderer is abated by the death of Ophelia. This censure, and the following praise of *Othello*, justify our former comment that Johnson regarded the drama as a game of skill: 'The fiery openness of Othello, magnanimous, artless, and credulous, boundless in his confidence, ardent in his affection, inflexible in his resolution, and obdurate in his revenge; the cool malignity of Iago, silent in his resentment, subtle in his designs, and studious at once of his interest and his vengeance; the soft simplicity of Desdemona, confident of merit, and conscious of inno-

cence, her artless perseverance in her suit, and her slowness to suspect that she can be suspected, are such proofs of Shakespeare's skill in human nature, as, I suppose, it is vain to seek in any modern writer.' It is well said of Emilia, that her virtue was worn loosely but not cast off. . . .

Johnson is less successful in his notes than his general remarks. The pleasure which the reading of Shakespeare undoubtedly gave him stimulated his imagination and heightened his other faculties, notably his common sense, and this reacted favourably upon his aesthetic power. In his notes he uses his intellect only, and we find him praising *Henry VI* at the expense of the other histories, uttering prosaic comments on the raven's hoarseness, failing to appreciate *Hamlet*. Yet the present day has a use for his fault-finding that the ages of faith had not. Because he is not awed by Shakespeare he can see clearly what is before him, and tell the truth about *All's Well* and *Cymbeline*, and thus join hands across the gulf with those of us at the present day who reject the Folio as the work of one man.

## II

WILLIAM KENRICK<sup>1</sup> set out to defend the text of Shakespeare from the *persecution* of his commentators. If Shakespeare wrote ungrammatically, he always wrote idiomatically. Johnson was incapable of commenting on him as a poet. He misrepresents him in his note on 'Thy best of rest is sleep'. Shakespeare was not declaring against the soul's immortality, for the Duke only speaks of the mere sense of death, the parting of the soul from the body. The Duke exhorts Claudio to prepare for death; and it is beyond doubt that Claudio had the strongest notions of a future state. Warburton and Johnson complain that Shakespeare 'entirely neglected measure'; but he had a poetical ear, and though he might not count his fingers, as probably these gentlemen do when they write verses, he no doubt surpassed in melody writers of his own day and the present. Shakespeare's editors fail when they venture an inch beyond the servile bounds of verbal criticism. Johnson blames Bertram (*All's Well*), but the match proposed to him was absurd and preposterous. The King provoked his disobedience; and though he was a loose, unprincipled fellow, the absurdity and cruelty of the forced marriage greatly palliates his crimes. . . .

Kenrick's work is strictly controversial, in that his praise springs from the opposing statements of antagonists: e.g. that Shakespeare wrote idiomatically, and that his verse was of finest quality. The latter statement is important; and his work interests as illustrating the critical manners of the time. It is a forerunner of Swinburne and Furnivall.

<sup>1</sup> *A Review of Dr. Johnson's new edit of Sh., 1765.*

## III

FOR the first time, with Richard Farmer,<sup>1</sup> Shakespeare's want of learning, in the sense of knowledge acquired from books, is thought to be a cause of strength rather than a disadvantage. Farmer contends that Shakespeare needed not the stilts of languages to raise him above all other men. Ben Jonson's testimony that he had small Latin and less Greek stands foremost, and some have accepted it as final. Others hold the contrary, and point to his classical allusions, ignoring the fact that he may have read them in translations. Men run into absurdities when they lay down a hypothesis, and then seek for arguments to support it. His amazing variety of style and manner, unknown to all other writers, is a sufficient argument to emancipate him from the supposition of a classical training. Perhaps he remembered enough of schoolboy learning to put the *Hig, hag, hog*, into the mouth of Sir Hugh Evans; and he may have learned from writers of the time, or in conversation, one or two French or Italian phrases, but his studies were confined to Nature and his own language.

## IV

MRS. MONTAGU,<sup>2</sup> replying to Voltaire's attack, affirms that Shakespeare is not to be tried by any code of critic laws, that his faults are nothing compared with his beauties, that he can rise to faults true critics dare not mend, that he surpasses Homer in delineating character, that he gives an air of reality to everything, and it matters little if his methods are not those prescribed in any Art of Poetry. French plays are undramatic, being conversations rather than representations of an action—as Voltaire himself admitted. An inarticulate groan moves more than an eloquent description: and Shakespeare could throw his soul into another's body and adopt his passions and sentiments. He was born in the rank where men express their passions freely, and perhaps that is why he knew more of the heart than the outward form; whereas French tragedians attend to the decorums of a man's rank.

He is one of the greatest moral philosophers. Varied interests and characters and mixture of the comic may weaken pity and terror, but will admit of moral instruction by giving occasion for many kinds of reflections. He saw the chance for new subjects between the extremes of tragedy and comedy, and that in the historical play he could represent the manners of the whole people and general temper of the times. He had but a heap of rude undigested annals to work upon, but he made it yield him the deepest mysteries of state. His characters are men, frail

<sup>1</sup> *An Essay on the Learning of Sh.*, 1767.

<sup>2</sup> *An Essay on the Writings and Genius of Sh.*, 1769.

by constitution, hurt by ill habits, faulty and unequal, but as they are of the same nature as ourselves their precepts are an instruction, their fates an experience, their testimony an authority, and their misfortunes a warning.

Nothing is harder in drama than to open to the spectator previous incidents that have produced present circumstances, and the characters of the persons from whose conduct, in such circumstances, the subsequent events are to flow. With what art has Shakespeare freed Hotspur from such hateful crimes as premeditated revolt and treachery, and hurried him by means of his impetuous soul from the sphere of obedience, so that we still admire him! Homer does not better sustain Achilles' wrath; and this is Shakespeare's best history—the most regular, less charged with absurdities, and less confused. The story of the Prince's youth was delicate to treat, as the country was proud of his fame, so Shakespeare has happily introduced Falstaff, whose wit excuses the Prince's irregularities. To the finesse of wit Falstaff joined the drollery of humour: the latter is a kind of grotesque wit, coloured by the person it resides in or the subject to which it is applied. Gluttony, corpulency, cowardice make Falstaff ridiculous without folly, and give him an air of jest and festivity; and the contempt which these vices raise in others prevents them from infecting. Only Shakespeare could have seen how fit it was to make a wise man like Henry IV reserved even with his friends, and confess the iniquities by which he obtained the crown only to his successor. The Archbishop of York is not a valiant rebel like Hotspur, but a cool politician to his friends, a deep designing hypocrite to his enemies, and one who pretends to be a physician to the State.

Shakespeare saw that popular superstitions were necessary to poetry, and in those of the Celtic nations there was something melancholy and terrible. In their traditions nature was animated by a kind of Intelligences—and the poet could use them for moral purposes. Awe of the presence of the Deity was not confined to temples and altars, but diffused over every object. These superstitions gave the western bards an advantage over Homer; and the age of fable is the golden age of poetry. Aeschylus exposes his supernatural beings in too glaring a light, so that they do not impart the unlimited terror of Shakespeare's. The witches do not enter Macbeth's castle, but remain in their allotted region of solitude and night, and act within their sphere of ambiguous prophecy and malignant sorcery.

The witches and spirits in *Macbeth* excite a terror that nothing human can excite, because human powers are limited, whereas we feel undefined dread when beings intervene whose nature we do not understand. Such dread keeps in our minds a sense of our connexion with awful and invisible spirits, who know our most secret actions, and from whom only innocence can defend us. Shakespeare gave Macbeth the

very nature to be wrought upon by such suggestions. The bad man is his own tempter; but Macbeth was generous and well inclined, but with vehement passions and aspiring wishes, likely to be seduced by splendid projects and ambitious counsels. His emotions are the struggles of conscience, his agonies those of remorse. Only Shakespeare among dramatists has set forth the pangs of guilt apart from fear of punishment. Clytemnestra's terrors arise from fear, not repentance, and the Chorus moralize in impersonal fashion. Macbeth's remorse affects us because it is a personal utterance. Shakespeare exhibits the movement of the human mind with amazing art, and only he understood the true use of soliloquy. He thus adds to the drama an imitation of the most difficult and delicate kind—that of representing the internal process of the mind in reasoning and reflecting. It is the best means of exposing the anguish of remorse and the working of conscience. In debating with himself Macbeth dwells chiefly on the guilt, though he alludes to the danger. In speaking to Lady Macbeth he urges his favour with the King and esteem with the people, as likely to weigh with one of her disposition. Guilt deprives his mind of peace, but never of fortitude in danger. His crimes terrify him more than all his foes in arms. Shakespeare knew that reason may expel the superstitions of the nursery, but they linger in the imagination.

Shakespeare never represents an action of one sort and raises emotions and passions of another. All the characters of *Julius Caesar* are duly subordinated to the hero. That Brutus may interest and display his true character, to which violence was foreign, he is shown in kindly relation to his wife, friends, servants. For the sake of public liberty he made as difficult conquest over his natural disposition as his ancestor did for like cause over natural affection. History gave Shakespeare a solid foundation of interest. He knew that it was easy to excite sympathy with things believed to be real. . . .

Mrs. Montagu's opening sentence reflects the Time-spirit: it is no longer necessary to defend Shakespeare against charges of want of art. It is beginning to be recognized that an irregular outer form may be needed to house a larger soul than the world had yet seen; and also that the object of a drama is to move the audience, and if that end is effected it matters not if rules are broken. There is thus a spirit of freedom in Mrs. Montagu's criticism; she starts with the conviction that Shakespeare's mind was the wonder of the world, and endeavours to explain her impressions. Her account of popular superstitions and the working of Macbeth's mind sounds a romantic note. Something of the great mystery, hitherto lacking in criticisms of Shakespeare, begins to make itself felt. Her words on the character of Brutus hint at the higher unity of plot and character which in time was to be recognized as a feature of Shakespeare's greater art.



## V

AS George Steevens<sup>1</sup> is famous among commentators we will include a few specimen notes. Benedict is a wit, humorist, gentleman, and soldier, but the first quality is disgraced by unnecessary profaneness—for the goodness of his heart hardly atones for the licence of his tongue. Shakespeare borrowed to save himself the trouble of inventing. He saw that the old plays of the *Shrew* and *John* were meanly written, yet their plans might furnish incidents for a better dramatist. He would therefore lazily adopt the order of the scenes, while writing the dialogue anew, and perhaps insert from each piece a few lines worth preserving. The behaviour of the Thane of Cawdor (*Macbeth*) corresponds closely with that of the Earl of Essex<sup>2</sup> as related by Stowe. In the manner of Cawdor Essex asked the Queen's forgiveness, confessed, repented, and was concerned to behave with propriety on the scaffold. Lady Macbeth is more ambitious, and therefore stranger to the softer passions than her husband, and more fiend-like. Amidst the horrors of guilt he speaks tenderly to her and uses endearing terms; but she uses no sentiment that expresses love throughout the play. As a contrast to Macbeth Banquo prays that he may not be tempted to encourage guilty thoughts even in sleep.

*Titus* has not the internal marks that distinguish the tragedies of Shakespeare from those of other writers. It has no interesting situation, natural character, or string of quibbles. That Shakespeare should have written without commanding our attention, moving our passions, or sporting with words is as improbable as that he should have avoided disyllable and trisyllable endings in this play only. Cloten (*Cymbeline*) is a coward against Posthumus, yet fights gallantly with Arviragus. He is called an ass, yet answers the Roman envoy nobly and reasonably. He parts in a dignified and civil manner with Lucius, yet is ridiculous and brutal to Imogen. Belarius says he has not sense enough to know what fear is, yet he schemes artfully to gain his mistress's affection, and seems acquainted with his father's character and the Queen's ascendancy over his uxorious weakness. Brave and dastardly, civil and brutal, sagacious and foolish, he is not subtly distinguished amid sense and folly, virtue and vice, as are mixed characters like Polonius and the Nurse in *R. and J.* The skill of the concluding scene far surpasses any contemporary writer, including Ben Jonson. Former events may have been incongruous, but there is nothing irregular here. The catastrophe is intricate without confusion, and as rich in nature as ornament.

The expression that Juliet's foot is too light to wear out the everlasting flint is violent hyperbole. The early events of *Hamlet* impress most, and there is no room for a conclusion suitable to the importance of its beginning. After the last interview with the Ghost, Hamlet's

<sup>1</sup> 1773.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Winstanley.

character loses its consequence. The speech 'There's a divinity . . .' is thus explained: A wool-man, butcher, and dealer in skewers, once observed that he had to shape the ends of the skewers which their part-maker only rough hewed. Whoever recollects the profession of Shakespeare's father will admit that his son might be no stranger to such a term. Hamlet's actions differ so widely from his moral sentiments that we can hardly accept him as a perfect hero. He causes the deaths of Polonius and his schoolfellows, and the madness and death of Ophelia, and creates an indecent scene at her funeral. Dr. Johnson said truly that in the end he revenged himself, not his father. The reading 'base Judean' is probably right in Othello's last speech; but it is not Herod, neither is an Indian base because ignorant. Herod was more than base, and the simile is too apposite. Each through jealousy destroyed an innocent wife; and such parallel circumstances hardly admit the variety which we expect in an allusion meant to illustrate another. . . .

Here again is a literal, matter-of-fact critic who gives no sense of the mystery of the great mind he interrogates. Certain allowance must be made for textual criticism; and his remarks on Cloten and Lady Macbeth are worth considering. But surely no poetically inclined person could have dismissed as 'violent hyperbole' the beautiful words about Juliet's foot and the everlasting flint. And his explanation of 'There's a divinity . . .' recalls a saying of F. W. Robertson's—that poetry creates life, but science dissects death. Yet there remains the historic interest—that many of the faults which he points out are being rediscovered now that the ages of faith are over, but with the difference that what we now regard as incidental were true obstacles to recognition of Shakespeare's genius in the time of Steevens.

## VI

EDWARD TAYLOR<sup>1</sup> argues that the tragedian's duty is to make us feel for the woes of others, and that he should present not the real, but the possible, because no play is actually mistaken for reality. At the same time he warns us that a dramatist should adhere to verisimilitude, because the more a play resembles reality the more it will please. At all interesting and affecting theatrical exhibitions we rather perceive than think: the mind is more passive than active. Perception produces sensation: when the first is grief the second is pity. Reflection causes pity to subside, because judgement tells us we have been deceived. It is not crimes on the stage that please the spectator, but their effects on him. They rouse his mind, bring home to him his security, and raise the flattering notion that enormities are punished; and the pleasure is increased by feelings of compassion for sufferers. If agreeable sensa-

<sup>1</sup> *Cursory Remarks on Tragedy, on Sh., &c., 1774.*

tions are felt in sorrow, it is because pleasure and pain are intimately allied.

For years past Shakespeare has been extravagantly praised, and allotted the first place as tragic writer beyond all competition. Is he even a good tragic writer? He either did not know the above rules or neglected them. He expands his time into months and years, and has no unity of place. His genius is not to be restrained by laws; he gives no air of truth to fiction, and imposes incongruities and impossibilities because he dares. Surely there are laws: but he leaves the beaten track for regions of the wildest and most fantastic imagination. He gives us impossibilities instead of the appearance of truth, and we remain undeluded. Passages may affect, but the whole is too extravagant to interest. He has great merit as a comic writer, still greater as a poet, but little as a tragedian. He did not present nature unadorned: the grave-digger scene is real life misplaced. He abounds in the true sublime, but also in the low and vulgar. It is mortifying, after soaring to the heights, to be brought down to grovel in dirt and ordure. How contrasted are the sublime and the bathos—yet how closely united in Shakespeare! No doubt enthusiasm cannot endure, yet we would rather let it subside into complacency and philanthropy than be hurried from heroes and philosophers into a crew of plebeians and buffoons.

The morals of his plays are usually just, yet he makes innocence suffer unnecessarily. The manner in which *Lear* is now performed proves that the melancholy catastrophe was not needed. Ingratitude is now properly punished; and the audience retire exulting in the mutual happiness of paternal affection and filial piety. All drama should end thus, so that mankind should be persuasively allured towards good actions. Virtue depressed may be amiable, but virtue triumphant must be irresistible. It may be objected that the death of the wicked does not cause pity; and that if innocence and virtue do not succumb pathos is lacking: but we would rather be deluded on the side of virtue, and flatter ourselves that to be good is to be happy. Shakespeare is great in fancy and imagination, poetry, character, knowledge of the human heart—but he neglects propriety and order, and exposes disgusting as well as beautiful figures. He has unrivalled strokes of nature, and wonderful descriptive and creative powers, so that we can share Romeo's love, Othello's jealousy, Hamlet's thoughts, Lear's madness: but we cannot talk bawdy with Mercutio, intoxicate ourselves with Cassio, or play the fool with Polonius or the puppy with Oswald. . . .

With the last sentences in mind it would not be fair to say that Taylor does not appreciate Shakespeare, but his appreciation is limited to particular passages, and to Shakespeare the poet rather than the dramatist and philosopher. He shows signs of being a critical follower of Voltaire and the French school. That he is shocked by mingling of comic and tragic, of base and sublime, shows lack of humour, and

there is little use for the critic who would exorcise Shakespeare's humour as an evil spirit. Yet he is historically interesting because he typifies a certain eighteenth-century manner of thinking that culminated in the revised *Lear* with its happy ending. The eighteenth century was a social time when men suppressed their bad thoughts: it has been observed that Boswell in his biography gave the social side of Johnson to the world and passed lightly over his hypochondria. But if men did not wish to be troubled they were becoming conscious and weary, and sought each other in order to escape from the deeper world into which self-communion might lead. Taylor expresses this moment, when the old world was ending, and the Aeolus cavern was about to be breached again, whence would issue the great winds that, for those who had ears to hear, were raging always in the universal land of Shakespeare.

## VII

KENRICK,<sup>1</sup> whom we have met before, admits that it is not easy to understand a comprehensive and sublime writer like Shakespeare. It may be that he is better understood when recited than read. The declamation of a Quin or a Garrick might reveal many exquisite strokes of character, passion, and humour which the poet designed, but which the critic might overlook. An abler actor might even improve upon the poet's conception. Shakespeare is even greater as a philosopher than a poet. His works contain a practical system of ethics, the more instructive because precept is joined to example. Moral reflections with him are not an appendage, as with other playwrights, but rise naturally from the situation and circumstance of the speaker. Hence they make a lasting impression on the memory, and have contributed more than any theoretical book in the language to form the national character for humanity, justice, and benevolence....

Two points stand out: it is recognized that Shakespeare is an unsolved mystery, not a mere working dramatist. Also the tribute to his ethical power, as organic with the play, is a hint that his elaborate and complex art is beginning to be seen.

## VIII

THOMAS WARTON<sup>2</sup> bewails the lack of criticism in Elizabethan times. There were no canons of composition, and so the poet's appeal was to his own voluntary feelings, his own immediate and peculiar mode of conception: and the result of this freedom of thought was undisguised frankness of diction. Shakespeare did not select and discriminate, but wandered in pursuit of universal nature, and descended headlong from his meridian of the noblest tragic sublimity to puns and quibbles, or from dukes and senators to buffoons and sailors.

<sup>1</sup> *Introduction to the School of Sh.*, 1774.

<sup>2</sup> *History of English Poetry*, 1774.

The importance of women's character was not yet acknowledged. The style of our ancestors' courtship may be inferred from the love-dialogues of Hamlet, Hotspur, Henry V, and Master Fenton. Tragic heroines—Desdemona, Ophelia—are degraded to the background; and the ladies of comedy are merely 'merry wives'. . . .

This is the same criticism as Taylor's, repeated almost word for word. We may add that what Warton says about women makes it clearer that it was the real and not the imaginative world which the critic wished to see reflected in the drama.

## IX

ELIZABETH GRIFFITH<sup>1</sup> declares Shakespeare to be a classic and contemporary with all ages. Only Voltaire is against him, who tries him by pedant laws. His plays are a distinct species of the drama; and as he did not imitate the Greek drama it cannot be said that he broke its rules. He is a model, not a copy, and he looked into nature, not books. Only Dr. Johnson considered his writings in a moral light, and therefore best understood his highest merit. He reads the human heart directly, not through books and theory, so he appeals to our intuitive sense. We feel his characters to be our acquaintances and countrymen, not strangers as with other dramatists. He cannot always maintain poetic justice, since human life is not the whole of our existence.

His magic makes credible to us the anomalous personages of the *Tempest*: were they really to exist, thus would they speak and act. The moral is that the guiltless should never cease to hope in the forlornest situations, because Providence never sleeps; and the wicked should not rest assured in the false confidence of wealth or power. No general moral is to be deduced from *M.N.D.*, but it contains the lesson that children should obey their parents. Little moral is to be found in *Verona*. From an amiable and virtuous lover and friend Proteus turns traitor. He does not repent from remorse, but because he is found out; and it is rare that Shakespeare transgresses unity of character. But one cannot restrain within the precincts of art one whose imagination and creative genius found even nature too straitly bounded to move in. Yet he has truly described the whole of love in this play. The speech 'Hath not a Jew eyes?' (*Merchant*) is a plea for universal charity; and the fifth Act illustrates the power of music to soften and persuade, where reason would fail. The opening of *A.Y.L.* reflects on the education of children; and a speech like 'How full of briars . . .' warns women not to deviate from the decorums of their sex.

The speech in *John*, 'Mad world . . .' (ii. 6), suggests three just reflections. That self-interest in the worldly sense is the ruling principle of mankind. That those who inveigh against corruption are

<sup>1</sup> *The Morality of Sh.'s Drama Illustrated*, 1775.

more often untempted rather than innocent. That the bad examples of those in high places tend to injure the morals of the inferior classes. Richard II made Bolingbroke and Mowbray swear not to consort in exile—and Warburton doubted if they still owed allegiance: but no penalty of law can dissolve in us our moral or political duty to our country. Hotspur's festivity resembles Hamlet's: assumed to relieve anxiety of mind and cover sanguinary purposes. The Prince's gaiety, like Falconbridge's, is more genuine, arises from natural temper and a healthful flow of spirits. Falstaff's humour is inimitable, and his portrait is drawn with so masterly a hand that it is the only one to give a great deal of pleasure without merit or virtue to support it. The Prince's manners are idle, but his morals uncorrupt. He shows a spirit of justice in injustice, and of duty even in disobedience. The good part of his character is its nature, the bad one but its youth. In the noble speech of dismissal to Falstaff, his great and amiable character is finely wound up. As Henry V, his Crispin speech contains many reflections and considerations which used formerly to inspire our troops with courage. The speech 'I was not angry . . .' reveals Shakespeare's thorough knowledge of the heart, because in his dangerous situation he needed above all to command his temper, but now the battle is won he can give rein to passion. Not content with raising Henry to the highest pitch in our admiration and esteem Shakespeare exalts him still further by representing him as lover and courtier: and he continues to be the same person in his courtship. Henry VI is fitter to be subject than king; and Shakespeare eternally acts the part of slave placed behind the triumphal car—not to show his own envy, but to abate another's pride. He contrives artfully to make Richard III's wickedness seem to arise from resentment against nature's partiality in stigmatizing him as a deformed person; and he thus makes us pity the misfortune even while we abhor the criminal. The courtship of Lady Anne is improbable; but no other writer could have fitly introduced such a familiar and comic touch as the strawberries on so serious an occasion. The ghosts are not to be taken literally, but allegorically, and man's nature is such that the slightest alarm from within affects him more than the greatest external danger.

The reader of *Lear* will always prefer Tate's version with its happy ending;<sup>1</sup> yet, if the object of tragedy is to excite pity and terror, in no other is it better achieved. Shakespeare's fools are not those of modern times, but speak much good sense throughout his plays. We pity and esteem Lear despite his weakness, passion, and injustice. No writer ever drew a mixed character like Shakespeare, because no one ever dived so deep into nature. Gloster's speech, 'As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods', is impious and unphilosophic. Gloster is soured rather than softened by misfortune, and this is further proved by his

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Taylor.

attempted suicide. The sentiment would not offend in the mouth of Edmund, though it were better not spoken at all. The dagger scene in *Macbeth* expresses the horrors of a guilty mind, haunted in its waking thoughts as well as sleep. Providence has opposed to vice all the bars it could, without depriving man of free will. Guilt has so strongly terrified Macbeth's mind that he invokes even inanimate matter not to inform against him. "Coriolanus has a spirited but harsh character—proud, fierce, impatient. Menenius shows a perfect knowledge of human nature in choosing the after-dinner hour to parley with Coriolanus. Shakespeare hurries on the assassination of Caesar, and does not give him fair play for his life or Brutus for his character. He is more impartial than those moralists who divide men into angels or devils; indeed, he has delineated every human virtue and vice in his several characters. Without pretending to dispute knowledge of human nature with him, it would have been hard to imagine a character like Enobarbus (*A. and C.*), presenting such contrasts of treachery and honour, had Shakespeare not portrayed him. The words of Imogen, 'False to his bed . . .', excite such sympathy that we feel the scene to be real; and we forget the theatre and are transported to the gloom and silence of the forest. In such instances Shakespeare has never yet been equalled and can never be excelled. He could not only assume all characters, but even their sexes. The Greek council in *T. and C.* surpasses anything in Homer: where the same argument is deliberated upon by the same chiefs, in just observation, rich imagery, and copious reflection. *R. and J.* is unsympathetic to the liberal British mind, because founded on the vicious prejudice of inherited family feuds. Also passion more than sentiment moves the lovers; and the catastrophe has moral besides poetical justice, since they undertook a rash engagement without the consent of their parents. The passages in *Hamlet* where the Ghost expresses tenderness towards his wife are unsurpassed by any Greek or Latin writer as a beautiful instance of forgiveness and of love subsisting even beyond the grave. Polonius speaks much good sense throughout, with a natural and respectable mixture of the old man in it. It is a mistake to give his part to a comic actor. *Othello* is the greatest effort of Shakespeare's genius. Desdemona is simple because she is innocent, not foolish. The work comprehends the completest system of the economical and moral duties of human nature ever framed by man.

Shakespeare is the greatest English poet, and equal to any Greek or Roman. His diction equals theirs; and he is one of the greatest of philosophers, because example is better than precept, and the dramatic philosopher is superior to the doctrinal.<sup>1</sup> His Scriptural allusions stimulate us to serious reflection in the very midst of our pleasures. . . .

Mrs. Griffith's general remarks on Shakespeare are right, but her

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Kenrick.

particular applications faulty. She places him correctly as the greatest poet of the world, &c., and she absolves his dramatic methods from pedant restrictions; but she disappoints when she persistently searches for morals. She has true intuitions, but a wrong critical system: in short, her virtues are her own, her faults those of her age. Such a comparison as that of the Greek council in *T. and C.* to the same in the *Iliad* could only be made in the dark ages of criticism. To expose the many absurd morals which she draws from the plays would be needless, but we will note especially those of the *Tempest* and *R. and J.*, the remarks on Gloster's speech, and the 'noble' words of dismissal to Falstaff. The latter stand out because she has analysed with some skill the Prince's character. To compare Hotspur with Hamlet is to confess her scale of critical values to be an outer one. On the other hand, her impressions from the speeches of Imogen and the Ghost in *Hamlet* are true in the highest sense: she has passed the invisible portals of Shakespeare's imaginative world. She is among the first to praise his skill in delineating women, and to note his practice of putting wise words into the mouths of so-called 'Fools'. She vindicates Shakespeare from want of art; but her saying that his genius is too great to be confined within the bounds of art would be fitly corrected by that of Mr. Lascelles Abercrombie: that the first law of Poetics is that the greater the inspiration, the more art is required.<sup>1</sup>

## X

THE key-note of Maurice Morgann's deservedly celebrated essay<sup>1</sup> is that Falstaff is no coward—nor does he think that Shakespeare ever meant to make cowardice an essential part of his constitution. He is generally thought to be a coward; we see him at the outset involved in circumstances of apparent dishonour; and his intimates call him a coward. He runs away at Gadshill, and he escapes from Douglas by counterfeiting death; and on the former occasion he takes refuge in the usual lies of cowards. The reader, therefore, seems justified in exclaiming that in drama the impression is the fact. However, cowardice is not the impression which the whole character of Falstaff makes on an unprejudiced audience. There is much to mislead the understanding; but we must distinguish between mental impression and understanding. The understanding is aware only of actions, and from these infers motives and character; but there is another sense which determines of actions from certain first principles of character beyond the understanding. We dislike or approve by some secret reference to these principles, not from any idea of abstract good or evil in the nature of actions. The impression is incommunicable; it is an imperfect sort of dumb instinct.

<sup>1</sup> *Idea of Great Poetry* (1925), p. 215.

<sup>2</sup> *An Essay on the Dramatic Character of Sir John Falstaff*, 1777.



Shakespeare understood real nature, and therefore dared to introduce an apparent incongruity of character and action. We all like Falstaff, but we all abuse him, and deny that he possessed a single good quality. Yet when he no longer amuses us we find no emotions of disgust, and we scarcely forgive the Prince's ingratitude. But if the difficulty has arisen out of the art of Shakespeare, who has made on us secret impressions of courage, and preserved those impressions in favour of a character which was to excite laughter on account of apparent cowardice, we shall cease to wonder. We look on Falstaff as the same kind of character as Parolles, yet we preserve for him the respect and good will which we deny to Parolles. Falstaff is at ease in danger, and we do not blame Shakespeare for departing from the truth. Perhaps his real character differs from his apparent, and this difference is the true point of humour. Perhaps he was intended to be drawn as a character of much natural courage and resolution.

His leading quality was wit and humour, accompanied with great vigour and alacrity of mind. It may have led him to early social success, and made it needless for him to acquire any other virtue. His very faults, since they were connected with his humour, made him esteemed and beloved. To this character he added the profession of soldier; and as he had a spirit of boldness and enterprise he was welcome among the great. Thus he passes through life with ease to himself and delight to others, till at last he mixes youth and age, enterprise and corpulency, wit and folly, poverty and expense, title and buffoonery, innocent purpose and wicked practice. He is not hated for bad principle nor despised for cowardice, yet involved in circumstances that suggest both. At the time of his life in which we see him he has become the most perfect comic character ever exhibited.

The kind of courage which is founded in nature and constitution he did possess, but that other kind—founded on a principle independent of courage, which will operate in spite of nature, and prefers death to shame—began with every other moral quality to lose its hold on him in his old age. His fictitious death at Shrewsbury bears the external marks of cowardice—aggravated by the player who practises the attitudes of fear. But the Falstaff of the play does or says nothing to show disorder of mind. The stratagem proves that he had all his wits about him.

His followers drop no single expression from which it may be inferred that he was a coward. Shallow remembers him as Page to the Duke of Norfolk, and considers him a great leader and soldier. Shallow is a ridiculous character, but he was the mouthpiece of common fame. Lord Bardolph informs Northumberland erroneously that Percy had defeated the King, and he includes Falstaff among the great names. The truth is that we see Falstaff only in his familiar hours, and are witnesses only of his buffoonery. We forget that he is 'Sir John with

the rest of Europe'. The Prince would not have procured a charge of foot for a known coward. The Chief Justice, who would receive the most authentic information, admits his service at Shrewsbury. Coleville yields himself to his very name and reputation. He is inquired for at the tavern that he may go to Court, on the ill news, to give his opinion as a military man of skill. In speaking of his exploits to the Chief Justice no doubt he exaggerates, but, without some ground of truth, the dialogue would be preposterous. Shallow cultivates him to have a friend at Court; Westmoreland speaks to him as an equal. We see him in the King's presence at a time when the Prince deserts his looser character, and would not have thrust forward a tavern companion. His speech, 'If I do grow great . . .', shows that nobility did not then seem to him at an unmeasurable distance.

Only established fame and military reputation could bring Falstaff into the royal presence on such an occasion. In camps there is but one virtue and one vice; military merit swallows up or covers all. Early in life he had known John of Gaunt—and this could not have been without personal gallantry and high birth. In the Feudal ages rank and wealth were connected with strength and courage: since men acquired and maintained their position by personal prowess. With Shakespeare's audience, therefore, courage and birth would be strongly associated: for which reason Shakespeare furnishes us with proofs of Falstaff's gentility, such as his grandfather's seal ring which he always carried with him. It is indicated that he kept up a certain state, having four or five servants, apartments in London, and a house in the country. He had been, as we said, Page to the Duke of Norfolk—a position much sought by young men of good family; and he can only have won his knighthood by courage. He had an honourable pension—the reward as well as the retainer of service. Perhaps Shakespeare alluded to this only carelessly, and generally obscured Falstaff's better parts, because we can only enjoy a wit when we have stripped him of every worldly advantage.

Shakespeare's characters differ from those of other writers. They have roundness and integrity which give them independence as well as relation. Thus we may feel passages, but cannot explain them without unfolding the speaker's whole character. All bodies have first principles of being, drawn from the elements; but each has also a peculiar growth of its own. Shakespeare conceived in the same way of the human mind. Courage, activity, sensibility, intelligence—also law, religion, government, profession—make up first principles. But as these are differently disposed the individual emerges, as Shakespeare discovered. To animate his characters he must have felt every varied situation. The distinction is that those characters, seen only in part, are capable of being unfolded and understood in the whole. A character often acts and speaks from those parts of the composition which are

inferred rather than seen. The effect carries us beyond the poet to nature. It is the art which we call nature because withdrawn from our notice. Felt propriety and truth from unseen causes is the highest point of poetic composition. Shakespeare's characters are whole and original, while those of other writers are mere imitation.

We feel rather than understand him, are possessed by him rather than possess him. The incidents and parts look like chance, but we feel that the whole is design. It is astonishing that a mere human being, a part of humanity only, should so perfectly comprehend the whole; that his exquisite art should convey the whole effect to every woman and child, while learned commentators often remain ignorant. The same genius pervades every kind of character; he suspends the laws of nature, and makes us insensible of shifting place and lapsing time. Aristotle would not have confined him to Greek rules, but would have recognized that a more compendious nature may be obtained—one of effects, which can dispense with relations of place or continuity of time. True poetry is magic, not nature—an effect from causes hidden or unknown. The magician is above law; and if he obtains his end who shall question the cause?

To return to Falstaff, it has been observed that no one character in the play impeaches his courage. Yet this is negative proof, and there is certainly no intention of representing him as a *Miles Gloriosus*. His boasting speeches are but humour, spoken to those who cannot misapprehend them. Among ignorant people, such as the Justices, or his own followers, he is reserved, and says nothing that may be subject to mistake. Lancaster's reproach sounds serious, but its effect depends on our opinion of Lancaster and the facts on which he grounds his censure. He had just performed a most treacherous act, and it is therefore not unnatural that he would take a plausible occasion to injure a frank unguarded man of wit and pleasure. Besides, Falstaff was a favourite without power, disliked by the Court as the Prince's misleader. The words intend disgrace, but so artful is the manner that they may pass for pleasantry. Lancaster speaks like Harry, and the gallows seem in more danger than Falstaff. There is no formal charge, and nothing to give Falstaff certain ground of defence. The insinuation is that he had not used all possible expedition to join the army; but his answer is the truth—that as soon as he left London he had hastened eagerly to the scene. Had not Lancaster perfidiously hastened events he would have arrived in time to share in the danger of a fair decision. The fact that Coleville yields to his name seems designed by Shakespeare to take off the rebuke. Thus the only serious charge against Falstaff's courage was founded in ill will and the particular character of Lancaster.

We turn to his actual service in battle. When he says that he has led his ragamuffins where they have been peppered, he speaks to himself, in soliloquy, and it is a fact. It is because he has more wit than

courage that we deny him courage at all. In the midst of the danger of the battle he was self-possessed and full of humour. It is not principle that supports him—since he renounces honour—but strong, natural, constitutional courage. The passage ‘If he [Percy] do come in my way, so . . .’ gives his true character as to courage and principle. Profligacy and courage are tinged by the same humour. These passages, spoken in soliloquy and in battle, have impressed on the world an idea of Falstaff’s cowardice. And yet he is resolute to take his fate should he meet Percy: if not, he will not seek inevitable destruction. He was a kind of military free-thinker, with too much wit for a hero. No doubt honour should strengthen natural courage; but natural courage which can act as such without honour is still natural courage—and Falstaff did possess this quality. But he had not virtue enough to become the dupe of honour, nor prudence enough to hold his tongue. As a compromise we may say that he renounced the vanities and superstitions of honour, but not the natural firmness and resolution to which he was born. It may be objected that he counterfeited death to escape Douglas: but he had no chance of victory or life. And he was wit as well as soldier: his courage was the accessory, his wit the principal. He lives by a stratagem growing out of his character; and he continues to counterfeit after the danger is over, that he may deceive the Prince.

The robbery at Gadshill is next to be considered. He had done an illegal act, and, now that the exertion was over, had unbent his mind in security—when he is suddenly attacked. He is not now as a soldier and with soldiers, but with known cowards, and against vigorous assailants. Conscious of guilt, amid darkness, he may think of prisons and the hangman, and not unnaturally take to flight. There was as much malice as jest in Poins’s intention. Shakespeare reveals by side-lights the jealousy and ill will in the rival situations of Poins and Falstaff; and Poins appears to be unamiable, if not brutish and bad. Hence the latter’s saying of Falstaff, ‘If he fights longer than he sees cause, I will forswear arms’, is the strongest evidence against presupposed cowardice. When Falstaff, instead of making a light answer to the Prince, says, ‘I am not indeed John of Gaunt your grandfather, but yet no coward, Hal’, he reveals his true character. Shakespeare throws it out as a caution to the audience not to take too sadly what was intended to be matter of a good jest for ever after. He supposes the travellers to be eight or ten, yet he attacks them with alacrity; and if he ‘roars for mercy’ when he runs away, it must have been a very inarticulate sort of roaring. There was no stage direction to the actor for that purpose, and the spirit of derision might easily exaggerate. Shakespeare did not intend the transaction to expose the false pretences of a real coward, but to involve a man of allowed courage in circumstances to cause suspicion of cowardice in such a way as to produce mirth. The proof is that great attention was paid to decorum

and truth of character. It was not thought decent that Falstaff should run till his companions had deserted him and he had exchanged blows with his assailants. Thus his accidental terror is distinguished from the natural cowardice of his three associates.

Falstaff is not a coward, still less a boaster, without which even cowardice is not sufficiently ridiculous. His braggadocios are braggadocios after the fact, and they are not general, but confined to this one fact only. The detection is immediate, but the shame has no duration, and for the rest of the play the character stands where it did before, without punishment or degradation. It is his lies, not his cowardice, that are detected, and this explains Poins's prediction. Falstaff's veracity, not his courage, was to be impeached. On this occasion his evasions fail him; he is at the end of his invention, and the best he can think of is instinct. Had he tried to vindicate his courage he would have mistaken the point of the argument: the question was his lies, not his courage. The lies of Parolles are brought into some shape, but Falstaff's are so preposterous that they are less lies than humour. They destroy their own purpose and are not the effect of a habit of imposition. In any case his whimsical humour and fantastic exaggeration would have led to detection; and here Shakespeare shows us Falstaff as he is, and also as he would have been under one single variation of character—the want of natural courage. He preserves Falstaff's real character in the moment he seems to depart from it, by making his lies too extravagant for practised imposition—grounding them on humour, not deceit—turning them into fair proof of general courage by appropriating them to the concealment only of a single exception.

Falstaff is a character made up of incongruities. Shakespeare knew that laughter was to be raised by the opposition of qualities in the same man, not by their agreement. He would not have attempted to cause mirth by showing cowardice in a coward unattended by pretence. Till now the fools of the stage were compounded of the coarsest materials; but Shakespeare intended to endow a buffoon with wit, humour, birth, dignity, and courage. Thus he has deprived Falstaff of every good principle, and concealed every bad one. His bodily infirmities do not awaken our compassion, and they make both his qualities and vices ridiculous. Levity and debauch are associated with age; corpulence and inactivity with courage.

A stage character is a mere impression; but if we wish to trace our impressions to principles that appear natural, we know not why, we must look to see if there is not something more in the character than is shown. By some happy art Shakespeare's characters are struck out whole from the block of nature. We may welcome a character on the stage that we should disapprove of in real life. Falstaff truly is a robber, glutton, cheat, drunkard, liar—lascivious, vain, insolent, profligate, profane. It was necessary to guard these vices from malicious motive

and ill principle which would have produced disgust. Actions themselves are neutral; the qualities of virtuous or vicious belong to the agents. If a dramatist suppresses vicious intention he may pass off actions of vicious motive as incongruities and the effect of humour. Vice, divested of disgust and terror, is ridiculous. Tears and mirth, and even humour and wit, grow from the same root of incongruity, either of sentiment, conduct, or manners. Wit consists in marking points of likeness between things supposed incongruous. Had Shakespeare used no arts to abate our respect of Falstaff, he might have grown into a respect inconsistent with laughter: but without courage he would not have been respectable at all. The first principles of character are courage and ability, and these were needed to support his other more accidental qualities. Parolles did not want wit, but for lack of courage was reduced to nonentity.

Like all men Falstaff had two characters, external and internal. He was 'Sir John to the rest of Europe', and unprincipled and debauched among his intimates: but the true Falstaff has a distinct and separate existence. His ill habits and the accidents of age and corpulence are no parts of his essential constitution. He is so invulnerable and safe in defeat that no ridicule can destroy him. Like Antaeus he rises with recruited vigour from every fall. He is detected not once, but many times; he is formed for at least two plays and perhaps a third. There was nothing perishable in his nature.

But towards the end we are prepared for his disgrace. The laborious arts of fraud which he practises on Shallow create disgust. We must therefore not complain if he falls before poetic justice: and we note that we are only told that his designs on Shallow had succeeded in the moment of his disgrace. We may conclude that Shakespeare meant to connect this fraud with the punishment of Falstaff. And yet, though detected and disgraced, he lives by detection and thrives on disgrace. He carries all within him to the Fleet—the same force of mind, the same wit, and the same incongruity. . . .

Like Madame de Sévigné we think we heard the sound of a horn in this wood! According to popular thought romance had not yet been reborn into the world, but after reading such an essay we doubt if it had ever died, except among the formal critics. Morgann describes Falstaff as a military free-thinker: we may parody this excellent phrase and call Morgann himself a critical free-thinker. By means of his free thought he has rediscovered Shakespeare, into whose mind he has looked untroubled by the theories of others. His criticism is the result of meditation; the impression is transfigured by his imagination and restored to earth by his intellect and humour. In the strength of all three he resembles Carlyle: we see the same kind of humour in the comparison of Falstaff with Antaeus, and such a phrase as 'Miles Gloriosus'; and often the same kind of thought, as when he says that

cowardice, without boasting, is not ridiculous. If the imaginative or romantic mood seems to predominate, the things of earth are not lost sight of, but, viewed steadily in their relation to eternity, they appear humorously incongruous. Like Carlyle he believes that the smallest fact is sacred because it is part of the universe.

Morgann's shade will forgive us if we say that he has proved too much. Falstaff stands or falls by his humour, which is a product of late civilization: and courage and cowardice are elemental qualities. We think it unnecessary to point out that Lord Bardolph included him among the great, that he was sent for to Court, that he was admitted into the King's presence, &c. The value of Morgann's inquiry is that he reveals for the first time how perfect and far-reaching was Shakespeare's art. The quotation from Mr. Lascelles Abercrombie, at the close of Mrs. Griffith, is here vindicated: the greater the inspiration, the more art is required. Morgann feels the mystery of Shakespeare's art, surpassing that of the Greeks: the distinction between the real and the apparent character which Shakespeare's magic conveys to us. He reveals to us, by his method of reading a play, that it is palpitating with life. Seeming-careless words of Poin become subtly dramatic; Lancaster's rebuke to Falstaff merely confirms his own treacherous character. Falstaff's partisans against the Prince are answered more effectually than they have been to this day. It may be true that Falstaff was hardly treated, but it is no light crime to steal a thousand pounds. In fine, Morgann for the first time proves that a play of Shakespeare's is a work of the finest art—and the reason why the art is the finest in the world is because the inspiration is the greatest in the world. Morgann's work survives because his imagination has been kindled by Shakespeare, and he has expressed the kind of immediate spiritual truth that does not change. Porphyry of ancient Rome—if memory fails not—composed an anti-Christian pamphlet which has not yet been answered. It is too much to say this of Morgann because Professor Stoll in our own day (1914) has proved historically that Falstaff was a coward. And yet in literature as in religion there can be no absolute proof. We therefore retain both essays according to our needs: remembering with Professor Stoll that Shakespeare wrote for the stage; and with Morgann that a great poet's ultimate court of appeal is the individual reader's meditating soul.

## XI

AMONG the critics of the last dozen years only Morgann properly acknowledges Shakespeare's art. He says that Shakespeare's name contains all of dramatic artifice and genius; that every woman and child feels the whole effect of his exquisite art, the cause of which is often mistaken by learned commentators. He remarks with insight that we call Shakespeare's art nature because it is withdrawn from our notice.

For lack of this insight Shakespeare is extolled as the poet of nature only by Dr. Johnson and Mrs. Montagu; while, according to Mrs. Griffith, his imagination and genius are too great to be restrained by art. Dr. Johnson calls his plots loose; and Mrs. Montagu says that he has the irregularity of greatness.

Dr. Johnson states that his characters are the genuine progeny of common humanity; Mrs. Montagu, that in delineating character he surpasses all dramatic writers, and Homer. Mrs. Griffith speaks of the naturalness of his characters, and his perfect knowledge of the anatomy of the human mind. She says that no age, sex, character, station, office of life escape him; that he has pointed out every virtue or vice in mankind, and could assume all characters and both sexes. In the words of Morgann, the roundness and integrity of Shakespeare's characters give them independence; they are whole and original, while those of other writers are imitation, and are struck out whole from the block of nature. Kenrick thinks him one of the greatest masters in describing the effects of the passions, and judges of their operations; Taylor records the distinction of his characters and knowledge of the human heart.

Mrs. Montagu and Kenrick call him a great moral philosopher. Dr. Johnson says that his drama is the mirror of life, but he does not distribute good and evil justly. Taylor finds the morals of his plays usually just.

Dr. Johnson recognizes his language to be smooth and harmonious, but calls his style ungrammatical, perplexed, and obscure. Kenrick considers that he wrote more melodious verse than any dramatic writer of his own age or the present. Farmer speaks of the amazing variety of his style and manner, unknown to all other writers; and Taylor, of his sublime diction. With Mrs. Montagu he draws inspiration from the well-head of pure poesy.

Of general tributes we get the following: from Dr. Johnson, that he was universal; from Kenrick, that he was the foremost man of all this world; from Mrs. Griffith, that he was a classic, contemporary with all ages, and his works are the Manual of Mankind; from Morgann, that it is astonishing that a human being, a mere part of humanity, should so comprehend the whole. . . .

It is now accepted that Shakespeare was a great delineator of character, philosopher, master of the passions, and maker of verse; but only Morgann recognizes that he was also a supreme dramatic artist. Otherwise it is still held that he pleased by accident. His especial knowledge of women is also being noted, as we see from Mrs. Griffith. But the general impression left by these later critics is that they are more specially trained as critics, and therefore more competent to give an opinion on their great subject. Criticism itself is advancing; and among their judgements many might be used to confirm or contradict writers of the present day.



## Chapter V

### ENGLAND 1779-1807

- I. CAPELL. II. MALONE AND STEEVENS. III. MACKENZIE. IV. RITSON.  
V. DAVIES. VI. RICHARDSON. VII. MASON. VIII. WHATELEY.  
IX. MACKENZIE. X. FELTON. XI. THOMAS ROBERTSON. XII. MALONE.  
XIII. PERCY. XIV. PLUMPTRE. XV. RICHARDSON. XVI. ECCLES.  
XVII. CHEDWORTH. XVIII. SEYMOUR. XIX. PYE. XX. CONCLUSION.

#### I

EDWARD CAPELL<sup>1</sup> is mostly concerned with verbal alterations or suggestions for emending the text, but now and then he has a critical remark worth preserving. He is impressed by the wonderful drawing of Cleopatra, and says that if any character in Shakespeare exceeded her it was Falstaff. He points out, in the scene in *2 Henry IV* where Prince John breaks faith with the rebels, that marks of it have appeared all along: that Westmoreland has made Prince John agree instantly to the Archbishop's demands, and stopped him in a heat he saw rising that might break off the treaty, and revealed himself still more in three sneering speeches. He admits that we should now condemn such conduct, but the contemporary historians, whom Shakespeare followed, thought any proceedings with rebels justifiable. Winchester's speech in *1 Henry VI*, 'Rome shall remedy this . . .' is as characteristic as anything in Shakespeare of the person who utters it. The position of the words, and their slow march, effected by the concurrence of two trochees, peculiarly express pride and surliness. Of the first scene in *Julius Caesar* he notes that Marullus and Flavius have different characters, though their parts are short. The first is grave and severe, and dislikes evasions and quibbles; the second is gentler, and shows greater skill in asking questions that put an end to evasions, but not to quibbling. He feels the difficulty of Brutus's command, 'Stoop, Romans, stoop . . .', but reconciles it with his character because it proves that he was entirely persuaded that his act was holy. He also questions Brutus's speech at the funeral, which was unlike his nervous, simple, laconic style, and calls Caesar more inflated than great. In this, his first Roman play, Shakespeare's genius seems to him sunk below the grandeur of Roman characters.

The disputed passage in *John* whether the bell 'sounds one' or 'sounds on' moves him to argue ingenuously for the former: that Shakespeare wished to impress the reader with awe and solemnity—and one stroke of the clock effects this far more than a sound that is

<sup>1</sup> *Notes and Various Readings to Sh.*, 1779.

repeated: every stroke beyond *one* lessening more and more the effect of it, till at twelve we feel nothing.

In *Lear* the King's tenderness for his Fool, and the Fool's love of his master, heighten the daughter's unnatural conduct. The first shows Lear's affectionate nature, and the second what is justly due to it. Though he speaks of the Porter scene in *Macbeth* as a needed interval for Macbeth to change his dress and wash his hands, he calls it masterly in its way, and open to no objections but such as lie against all mixture of comic and serious. *R. and J.* is a widely celebrated play, but it unites the extremes of greatness and littleness, in conceptions and in their dress. The humour of the *Shrew* is 'whimsical', made up of foreign and dead languages, with English measures and rhymes: a sentence of Terence, moulded into a rhyming six-foot heroic, will be followed by a rhyming Italian couplet in English doggerel. The behaviour of all the persons in the dreadful scene where Lavinia (*Titus*) kisses the heads of her brothers is singularly proper; and the horrid 'laugh' of the father has something great in it even for Shakespeare. . . .

These specimens show that Capell has some flashes of insight, both in praising and fault-finding, but little understanding of the whole of Shakespeare. He does well to single out Cleopatra and Falstaff as two of Shakespeare's supreme portraits; and his remarks on *R. and J.* and *Julius Caesar* are worth considering at the present day when the work of other hands is suspected. That he praises *Titus* and finds the true Shakespeare in *1 Henry VI* condemns him. To his opinion of the bell in *John* we would like to object Poe's story, where the twelve strokes of midnight affect cumulatively the shuddering masquers.

## II

MALONE,<sup>1</sup> whose name is a landmark in verbal criticism, says prophetically that we must discover Shakespeare's whole library, trace to their sources the plots of all his dramas, point out every allusion, and elucidate every obscurity, before we can understand him. Malone is not happy in aesthetic criticism, being matter of fact, unimaginative, and unconscious of the new breezes that were stirring the leaves of the Shakespearian forest. He half sympathizes with the critic who blamed Macbeth's 'multitudinous seas', because such a property of the seas was little related to the object before him. He maintains that if Macbeth had spoken thus in his castle at Inverness the remark would be just; but it was Shakespeare himself who spoke as he did when Romeo describes the apothecary's shop on hearing of Juliet's death—or Othello, tortured by jealousy, describes the course of the Pontic sea. Steevens had criticized *Pericles* that alone among the plays the char-

<sup>1</sup> Supplement to 1778 edit. of Sh., 1780.

acters were ill connected and did not combine to produce the climax. Malone replies that Shakespeare pursued the story as he found it, as was his common fashion, and the cause of most of his faults. He does well to remind us that Shakespeare was a working playwright who answered the call of supply and demand.

Steevens had criticized *Venus* unfavourably, but the part of moralist ill became him, and his distinctions merely touch the subject without the execution. He says that Adonis does not pretend to have subdued his desires to his moral obligations; that he strives to draw an impossible line, to separate the purer from the grosser part of love: but what he does is to prefer one gratification to another, to enjoy field-sports rather than immortal charms. He proceeds to depreciate Shakespeare's power in narrative: to which Malone replies that the first essay of Shakespeare's muse did not appear to him so poetically lacking. To Steevens, Shakespeare's dramatic dialogue revealed his command over every passion, but in narrative he was on a level with most common writers. To Malone, Shakespeare's genius for drama was almost a gift from heaven, but he agrees that as a narrative poet he was only equal to other mortals. Steevens dislikes the sonnet form, and speaks of 'quaintness, obscurity, and tautology', in connexion with Shakespeare's sonnets. Malone defends them from being 'a mass of affectation, pedantry, circumlocution, and nonsense', but objects that they lack variety and are mostly addressed to a masculine subject. He concludes that some are obscure, but others both clear and energetic: and this carefully measured praise, even more than his censure, reveals his own place and that of his age in Shakespearian criticism; whereas Steevens unknowingly confesses himself by remarking that Shakespeare may occasionally be absurd, but is seldom foolish: he may be censured, but can rarely be despised.

### III

HENRY MACKENZIE<sup>1</sup> says that no author has ever existed of whom opinion has been so various as Shakespeare. Gifted with all the sublimity and all the irregularities of genius, he broke the arbitrary rules of criticism and left no legal code to be tried by. He had almost supernatural powers of invention, absolute command over the passions, and wonderful knowledge of nature. He cared little to construct his stories well or make his incidents probable, but took them at random from tale or romance. Yet he never erred in the human mind; and, in impossible situations, his persons speak the language of the heart, and speak in character.

The basis of Hamlet's character is extreme sensibility of mind, apt to be strongly impressed by its situation, and overpowered by the feelings which that situation excites. Reflection would irritate his mis-

<sup>1</sup> *The Mirror* (Edinburgh), No. XCIX, 18 April 1780; No. C, 22 April 1780.

fortunes which sprang from his sense of virtue and natural affection. Shakespeare has skilfully placed this character, too exquisitely sensitive to act, in scenes of wonder, terror, and indignation, where its emotions contend with imagination and passion. Both his virtues and weaknesses come home to us, and we see a man who might have exercised every moral and social virtue in ordinary conditions placed in a situation where his good parts aggravate his distress and perplex his conduct. We are torn between compassion and anxiety—and hence the indescribable charm of Hamlet, which the more perfect characters of other tragedies lack. When he dies we forget the others and their crimes, and dwell only on the memory of that 'sweet prince'. We surmise that Shakespeare at times began a play without preconceived plan, and let a favoured character beguile him to modify situations and incidents. The Ghost—which Shakespeare himself added—helped to unfold Hamlet's character. The weakness of sensibility would become salient from the uncertain kind of belief following the communication of such a visionary being.

His madness is affected, and controlled by reason, except at Ophelia's grave. In *Lear* also, real and pretended madness are set side by side, and in both plays the true and the false are similarly discriminated. Ophelia harps on her father, Lear on his daughters; but Edgar never ventures to touch on a father's cruelty; and if Hamlet had been as firm in mind he would not have alluded to his uncle. Hamlet did love Ophelia, though he abused her—but he would naturally go as far from the reality as possible. Shakespeare is said to delineate love less happily than other passions. He had an instinctive perception into the recesses of nature, but knew not refinements of delicacy or nicer shades of polished manners. There is therefore something coarse in his love scenes, but not in his situations of deep distress or violent emotion where manners are lost in passions. Hamlet's talk with the gravedigger shows deepest melancholy rooted at his heart. His light view of serious things marks the power of that great impression which swallows up all else, and makes Caesar and Alexander as nothing. . . .

Mackenzie divines truly that the seat of the tragedy is Hamlet's mind, and the action is ruled by its complexities. He says that Shakespeare's genius is irregular, that he broke the rules so as better to reveal true passion—but what he takes away with one hand he restores with the other. He unconsciously attributes a greater art to Shakespeare who could thus make his action subserve so complex a character. He anticipates Goethe when he says that under other conditions Hamlet might have exercised every virtue; and his surmise that Shakespeare was drawn away from preconceived plans to develop a character that interested him is proof of sympathetic understanding. Modern research has shown that the original play was a tragedy of revenge, and Shakespeare rewrote his first draft under the spell of the

thought of what such a character might become. The external events are an ill-fitting garment: the Hamlet who killed Polonius and sent his friends to death is not the Hamlet of the soliloquies. Mackenzie is thus truly impressed when he says that we forget the others and their crimes and dwell only on the memory of that 'sweet prince'. He has seen the reality—the particular charm of Hamlet's character.

#### IV

JOSEPH RITSON<sup>1</sup> defends Hamlet against the charges of Steevens. The latter said that Hamlet sent his old friends to death though they knew not what the mandate contained—that he caused Ophelia's distraction and death, broke through all decency at her funeral, insulted her brother, and finally killed the King to revenge himself. Ritson calls it a severe and unexpected attack on Shakespeare's favourite character—a character whom both tradition and his own sentiments and feelings have made us admire and esteem. The amiable, injured, distracted, and unfortunate Hamlet is represented as worthless and immoral. But the answer is that he had to proceed cautiously because the usurper was powerful, and he could not kill the King and tell the people a ghost had ordered him to do it.<sup>2</sup> He knew that his schoolfellows were leagued with the King and might well conclude the secret of the packet had been revealed to them. If he behaved extravagantly at the grave it was from the shock of Ophelia's death. When he stabs the King he upbraids him for his crimes of incest and murder, not for the treachery to himself. . . .

Much of this reasoning is sound, especially that on Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Ritson remarks that Hamlet is Shakespeare's favourite character—and we will recall what was lately said by Mackenzie about Shakespeare's methods in composing the play. The modern world has felt the disharmony between Hamlet's character and actions, and accounts for it that the character of Hamlet was Shakespeare's own, the play itself one of the theatrical stock. This was not realized in Ritson's day, but the fact that he defends Hamlet shows that Shakespeare had not worked his miracle in vain. The miracle is that we do think of Hamlet apart from his actions; and when Ritson remarks that he was universally admired and esteemed, we gather that this was the popular, though inarticulate, view. The intuition of critics like Steevens was less fine; and they deduced theories from words and thoughts in Shakespeare as if they were facts, without letting them dissolve in their minds. It is to be noted that Ritson starts a train of thought afterwards developed by Werder—the usurper's external power, and Hamlet's need to justify in public a murder commanded by

<sup>1</sup> *Remarks on the Text and Notes of the Last Edition of Sh.*, 1783.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Werder.

In his Preface Ritson calls Shakespeare the god of the writer's idolatry, and the darling child of nature and fancy—and he boldly conjectures that there may yet be another edition of his works.

THE greater part of the criticism of Thomas Davies<sup>1</sup> is in the old style of judging according to principles fixed beforehand of the kind of entertainment the drama should provide. We need therefore make no systematic journey through his pages, but merely search them for typical opinions. He praises Constance's speech (*John III.* i) because it concentrates into twenty-six lines numberless variations of action and passion—the result of an agitated mind inquiring into the truth of that which it dreads to know. For him Act III contains more scenes where pity and terror distress the soul and sway it equally than anything else in Shakespeare. There is nothing so heart-rending in Euripides as the grief of Constance. Nor have the ancients depicted passions and their effects on the mind like Shakespeare in the dealings between the King and Hubert. *Richard II* (IV. i) gives the strongest and truest possible picture of the savage manners of our ancestors. The historical plays as a whole contain excellent advice and warning to king and people, and reveal to them their ancestors as in a mirror. In *All's Well* Shakespeare uses action and character to good effect, and raises abundant mirth from his situations. The witch scenes in *Macbeth* gave him occasion to steer adroitly between the superstitions of the credulous who believed such beings existed, and the scepticism of the enlightened who accepted them as creatures of fancy who contributed to the poet's design and to the delight of the audience. The scene after the murder is beyond praise, and dissuades from that dreadful crime more powerfully than any formal exhortation. Macbeth's sensibility, and his remorse and agonies, afford the spectator rational and severe delight. The portrait of Caesar does not satisfy, only his courage and urbanity being preserved. Caesar was many-sided; but Shakespeare seems only to understand that he was urbane and affable. The catastrophe of *Lear* overbears human nature; and Tate was right to substitute a happy ending and a marriage between Edgar and Cordelia.<sup>2</sup> The latter connects the main plot, and prevents the action falling too heavily on Lear. Not one passion alone moves Lear, but rage, grief, indignation, tumultuously combined, all claiming to be heard at once, and each interrupting the other. *A. and C.* most interests the passions, and is therefore more dramatic than other plays written on the subject; but the minute events described lessen the grandeur of the whole. Yet the several pictures in themselves are

<sup>1</sup> *Dramatic Miscellanies*, 1784.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Mrs. Griffith and Taylor.

complete, varied, and entertaining, if not all finely coloured or highly finished.

The above are in the conventional critical style of the age, yet we may cull from his rather monochromatic pages a few separate judgments born of meditation. He rates *1 Henry IV* above all Shakespeare's plays, not for its invention, passion, or incidents, but for delineation of character, propriety of sentiment, dignity of expression. He considers Falstaff Shakespeare's masterpiece, and the dramatic masterpiece of the world. Against Morgann he argues that were the knight proved to be a man of courage, half the mirth he raises would be misplaced. In his use of the Fool or Clown Shakespeare has surpassed all our old dramatists: the duty of that character being to revive the mirth, cheer the spirits, and dry the tears of the auditors after a serious or pathetic scene. So far so good: but he proceeds to say that the witches in *Macbeth*, though not absolutely comic, never failed to provoke laughter. He reminds us that Ben Jonson could not blend comedy with tragedy so happily as not to destroy the effect of either. Shakespeare drew characters singular in form, yet straight from nature's mint, and such as neither ancient nor modern writer had conceived. He combined in his imagination all the possibilities of human action with the varieties of situation and passion. This wonderful creative faculty places him above all dramatic writers; and only he discerned how far the exercise of the noblest qualities of the mind could and ought to proceed. One of his most powerful strokes is when Lear recovers from madness and recollects Cordelia. Surely this scene of domestic sorrow surpasses all that has been written. The heroes of Greek tragedy are often superhuman, those of the French too national. Shakespeare is the most moral of writers, as appears in passages like, 'The gods are just. . . .' There are no such original women characters outside his pages. When Cleopatra prepares to die she is sublime, and we esteem and lament her the more, whom in life we could not praise. His plots, like those of Beaumont and Fletcher, are improbable, but his beautiful superstructure makes us forget the foundation. The casket story in the *Merchant* is absurd, yet in the hands of our enchanter it passes for true history. Shylock is odious, but the writer's art interests us for a time in his favour. The scene in *Hamlet* where the Ghost speaks tender words of the Queen is one of the glories of the English stage.<sup>1</sup> Voltaire condemned the grave-digger scene; but the medium through which human wit and moral truth are to be conveyed surely imports less than the qualities themselves. . . .

Excepting what he says of the witches there is much to arrest in these verdicts. He is less general than many previous critics, and excels in applying his ideas to particular instances; yet he is an unequal critic with a passion for external proofs, and just when we think his

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Mrs. Griffith.

mind is softening into meditation, it will harden into fact. It is interesting to be told that Caesar was the best-bred man of antiquity, besides the greatest soldier, but it does not throw light on Shakespeare. On the other hand, he traces the history of the Fool in such a way as to make us realize his part in Shakespeare. Mirth, he says, is natural to man; in feudal days a jest might provoke a combat; a king would therefore hire a fool, with whom no one could be angry, who treated all alike; and a keen-witted fellow might utter home-truths which no man could resent without exposing himself to derision. Modern times have approved his choice of the greatest scene in Shakespeare: Lear's recovery from madness. Yet in the same breath he prefers Tate's version with its happy end. So does Cleopatra, for the modern reader, develop with the play from a courtesan to a glorious queen. That he could appreciate a whole play in the right manner appears from his remarks on the *Merchant*: that Shakespeare's magic makes the reader forget the absurd bases of the plot—the bond and the caskets. Like Morgann and Mackenzie he is aware that Shakespeare's characters are complex; and some of his analyses are skilfully made: e.g. Macbeth and Antony. He notes that the latter does not reproach Enobarbus for deserting him, but blames his own adverse fortune which had overthrown the principles of the best man. Like all critics of his time, except Morgann, Davies was hampered by the fashions of criticism—but he was particularly unequal in himself, with a wide gulf between his best and worst.

## VI

THE object of William Richardson<sup>1</sup> is to study human nature—but it is difficult to observe passion in others, or to recollect its true nature in ourselves after it has subsided. Writers like Shakespeare, who excel in imitating the passions, contribute to philosophy. To imitate perfectly the poet must become the person he represents. Shakespeare invented the characters of Hamlet, Macbeth, Othello, and actually felt the passions ascribed to them. He knew all the passions, and pursued passion through all its windings and labyrinths. He united the two essential powers of dramatic invention—that of forming characters and imitating the passions that compose them.

Macbeth becomes totally changed: ferocity succeeds mildness, treason duty. Passion becomes immoderate through imagining the happiness that is to be. He succeeds in inferior enterprises; higher objects are exhibited to him; and his partially gratified ambition becomes more violent. Duncan names his son successor; and this unexpected obstacle stimulates Macbeth's ambition. He soon appears reconciled to treason; his soliloquies show the depraved constitution of one who

<sup>1</sup> *A Philosophical Analysis and Illustration of some of Shakespeare's Remarkable Characters*, 1784.



is only deterred from crime by dread of punishment and regard for opinion. Then he reflects on it as an event which he desires but dares not bring about; his courage and honour are questioned; and when the sense of honour is corrupted, virtue expires. After the crime his ambition is attained: but will he enjoy repose? A gratified passion ceases to exist, and the mind is left vacant. But the suppressed propensities remain in the mind, and, when opposition is removed, resume their station. Although humanity, compassion, duty, regard for opinion had contended with ambition in vain, their principles were not extinguished, and now they return with violence. He feels he is hated by all, and his soul is tormented by suspicion. It makes him afraid of the virtuous: for vice is tyrannical and makes us hate what nature has rendered lovely. A sensitive and beneficent man will conceive more strongly the indignation excited by crime, and will behave more cruelly than one who is rugged and insensible. Sensibility infuses terror into a corrupted mind, and produces hatred and inhumanity. Vice bends to its baneful purposes even the principles of virtue.

Hamlet is moved by an exquisite sense of virtue, of moral beauty and turpitude. The principle and spring of all his actions is the standard of moral excellence in man. Now he discerns turpitude in a parent: and to give vent to a passion is to increase its violence. We ascribe to those with whom we are indignant not only the one crime, but all the crimes of which we believe them capable. The most virulent hatred is that which has grown out of friendship. Hamlet ascribes total degeneracy of nature to his mother: had he been more indifferent he would not have felt such misery.

Jaques has extreme sensibility: and the pain of disappointed passion is not only because we are deprived of the desirable object, but because the current of the mind is opposed, so that the excited passion recoils exasperated upon the heart. The mind suffers most when its operations are suddenly suspended. Melancholy and misanthropy appear in the character of Jaques; and Shakespeare runs one into the other, and delineates their shades where they imperceptibly blend, with amazing delicacy. Imogen's ruling passion is love ratified by wedlock, and therefore separation or fear of inconstancy or disaffection call forth secondary emotions. . . .

As Richardson's intention is to make poetry subservient to philosophy, his criticism of Shakespeare can only have a secondary interest. It just has the historical interest of proving that Shakespeare's knowledge of human nature was recognized as scientific, and himself as one from whom formal philosophers might learn. But its interest as a commentary is purely negative. The passions were made for man, not man for the passions; and Shakespeare's achievement was to show them instanced in the individual. If, therefore, such an abstract treatise

comes to life at points, it is because it makes us realize this indirectly. His best saying is that the spring of all Hamlet's actions was disgust at his mother's conduct. This will be approved by those modern critics who affirm that the shock of his mother's marriage to Hamlet was greater than his father's death.

## VII

WITH John Monck Mason<sup>1</sup> we return to that manner of criticizing chosen passages literally, as if they were stated facts—and wrangling with former editors—which might well be omitted, but that it brings home to the reader a characteristic eighteenth-century method. The words of Ariel's song had been much disputed, and Mason restores 'after sunset', because, when night set in, Ariel might retire to his couch in the cowslip's bell, but, during twilight, no doubt he amused himself with flying on the bat's back. Steevens, he says, forgot that 'after summer' the bats cease to fly, and though Shakespeare may not have read natural history, he observed nature accurately. He himself blames Johnson and Steevens for construing poetical expressions too literally—such as the passage about the glow-worm in *M.N.D.* They censured Shakespeare for representing the glow-worm's light to be placed in the eyes; but the blunder, says Mason, is theirs—for a poet is justified in calling the luminous part of a glow-worm the eye. The Friar's speech in *M. for M.* had astonished Dr. Johnson; but Mason reminds him that the Friar spoke more as philosopher than Christian divine; and he takes occasion to remark that the play more abounds in harsh sentences than any other of Shakespeare's. Steevens had blamed as capricious the sentiment in the *Merchant* that the man who has no music in his soul is fit for all bad things. Mason gravely explains it: much as the good father of the family pursues the little snow-maiden and tries to bring her near the warm hearth in Hawthorne's beautiful tale. He agrees with Malone that the 'multitudinous seas' of which Macbeth speaks mean the seas that swarm with inhabitants. Alluding to Italian literary influences, and to the fashion in Shakespeare's day to imitate the Italians, he says Shakespeare proved that he admired them by writing 154 very miserable sonnets in their style.

## VIII

THOMAS WHATELEY<sup>2</sup> extols Shakespeare's skill in character-drawing. No assemblage of traits will together form the character of an individual. His qualities are mixed in a certain proportion, and each affects the other, and a villain differs not more from a saint than he does in some particulars from another as bad as himself. The comic

<sup>1</sup> *Comments on the Last Edition of Sh.'s Plays*, 1785.

<sup>2</sup> *Remarks on some of the Characters of Sh.*, 1785.

writers have overdone individual peculiarities; but Shakespeare avoids extremes, and his characters are masterly copies from nature, differing each from the other.

Richard III and Macbeth are two opposite characters in the same circumstances. Macbeth's natural temper would have deterred him from crime, but Richard was ambitious and cruel from birth. Macbeth has natural feelings of humanity, hospitality, gratitude, and is affected by Duncan's mild virtues. Only supernatural intervention makes him act contrary to his disposition. Richard is savage by nature, and delights in crime: but Macbeth is in agony to think of it. He is pensive even while he enjoys the effect of crime; but Richard exults at the thought of committing crime. Richard despises Henry for meekness, Macbeth esteems Duncan for it. Richard wished to possess the crown, and was not preoccupied about the succession. Pride, or lust of power, was the cause of his ambition, vanity of Macbeth's. Richard delights to trample on men, Macbeth's ambition is that of a weak mind, that seeks pre-eminence of place, not dominion. When he finds that as king he is not loved and respected, he sinks under the disappointment. Courage forsakes him when a deed is done: whereas Richard is serene after every crime. Richard acts for his advancement, not security; his fear is to lose the great object of his ambition. Macbeth dreads the danger to his life; and this terror damps the joys of his crown. Macbeth is often alarmed on trivial occasions, and shows natural timidity: he even catches the terror from the messenger's face; yet, if his courage is not constitutional, it is acquired, and he can resume it after a shock. He continually asserts that he is a manly character—and he never rose above that ideal. When Richard is alarmed by the ghosts he remains conscious of his general intrepidity, and does not desire to conceal his agitation, but only wonders that he can fear. He artfully conceals his real disposition, but Macbeth need not, for he is not bad. Macbeth cannot conceal his sensations; he gives unnecessary explanations to Banquo's murderers; and he even sends a third murderer at the last moment. Richard makes men his instruments, not his confidants. Macbeth lets Macduff escape, and then takes vengeance on his family: Richard acts from design, not passion, and stops when his purpose is accomplished. At the hour of extremity Macbeth can only despair, though in the end he behaves with temper and spirit: but Richard prepares to fight for his crown and life with a perfectly even temper, and never starts into intemperance or sinks into dejection. . . .

A comparison between Shakespeare's early and mature work seems crude at the present day, especially when little of *Richard III* is credited to Shakespeare—yet it has its uses. W. P. Ker once wrote that no one is asked to make his choice between *Paradise Lost* and Pepys's *Diary*, but the incongruity of the comparison brings home to us the value of the *Diary*. In the same way, although Whateley judges Macbeth by

his immediate actions and is insensible to the world of thought and feeling that underlies them, the comparison suggests to us how nearly Richard approached the ideal man of action. The allusions to Macduff and his family, and Richard's wonder at his own fear, are particularly arresting. It is to be noted that he is puzzled by the third murderer of Banquo, although he is far from feeling any mystery. To us in modern times the third murderer, who dashed out the light, is one of the greatest Shakespearian problems.

## IX

SIX years after his study of Hamlet we find Mackenzie writing about Falstaff.<sup>1</sup> He says that Shakespeare may not surpass Homer in incident, characters, images, but he does in the creations of fancy. Nothing in the *Iliad* surpasses the *Tempest* or *Macbeth*. In these Shakespeare created beings that were neither in tradition nor romance, and invented language and manners for them for which mankind provided no analogy, yet they were true to nature. But also in the beaten field of ordinary life he produced perfectly original characters—such as Falstaff. His business was to charm the Prince, so Shakespeare made him witty, humorous, sagacious, and acute, but also gross-minded—which the Prince could not but see and despise. He thus had the means to attract Henry, and the vices to hinder him becoming too attached. His crimes would waken contempt, not indignation, and this would promote the ridicule of the situation. He has much good sense, and thinks like a wise man, though he may talk unwisely. Shakespeare's most conspicuous quality is good sense—the intuitive sagacity with which he looks on the manners, characters, and pursuits of mankind. Spectators are usually arrested by his passion and sublimity; but equally striking is his method of acutely perceiving and accurately discerning ordinary character and conduct, and skilfully delineating the plan of common life. It may even be a more wonderful power of genius to tell us what actually exists, though it has never seen it, than to create what never existed. With this power to penetrate character and motives Shakespeare has invested Falstaff. He thinks rather than talks sensibly—for we may call his soliloquies his thoughts. He has infinite humour and admirable wit, but the ruling characteristic of his disposition is epicurean grossness.

None of his passions rise beyond the control of reason, self-interest, or indulgence. He is a coward on principle rather than from weakness; he senses danger, but is not discomposed by fear. His cowardice is in proportion to the danger, as every wise man's would be did not other feeling make him valiant. He enjoys the pleasures of the moment, not the refining pleasures of the imagination which are removed from

<sup>1</sup> *The Lounger* (Edinburgh), Nos. 68 and 69, May 1786.

sense. Yet he shows great imagination in humorous passages; and we wonder at Shakespeare's art in leading the powers of genius, imagination, and wisdom captive to this son of earth. There is a contrast, like that of Ariel and Caliban, between Falstaff's sensual, brutish mind and the invention, wit, and humour of his conversation. As opposed to *Don Quixote*, the ridicule consists in subjecting wisdom, honour, and good principles to the control of grossness, buffoonery, and folly. Falstaff makes the heroic part of our nature appear mean and absurd—whereas in *Don Quixote* the common and the servile are clothed in the dresses of the dignified and the majestic. . . .

With Morgann's treatise fresh in our minds we will not rediscuss Falstaff, still less his courage or cowardice. We will confine ourselves to Mackenzie's method, which affords a distinct loophole into critical prospects. His defect is that although he recognizes Shakespeare's imagination—which is none the less active when it ceases to invent, and occupies itself in putting life into earth-bound creatures—he insists on Falstaff's gross-mindedness. He thus reveals his conception of imagination—merely to make real to the spectator a figure once caught in the mind's eye. As yet he knows nothing of the mind's power to make innumerable returns upon itself, with the result that the imagination sublimates. Carlyle compared Dr. Johnson to Ariel in the hull of a Caliban: the most friendly of men, the first impression he made was to disgust, till the charm of his conversation caused the most critical to forget certain of his habits which we must admit were displeasing. Mackenzie stresses Falstaff's grossness at the expense of his charm—and the reason is that, as a critic, he has imperfectly analysed the power of Shakespeare's imagination. On the other hand, he draws much finer distinctions than the critics who have lately been before us, and the comparison with *Don Quixote* gives a creative touch to his figure of Falstaff.

SAMUEL FELTON<sup>1</sup> starts with a tribute to Shakespeare's many-sided genius—ranging from the sombre and gloomy imagination that dived into the mysteries of witchcraft and incantation in the cavern of the Weird Sisters, and there trod in the circle where none but he durst walk—to the fancy that created fairies and elves. Of *Titus* he says with insight that such a sanguinary performance will not interest, but it has occasionally some fine touches of a superior hand, which must have been Shakespeare's—and there are touches of Shakespeare in the Clown. *Coriolanus* abounds in fine sentiments, but has few concerns that touch the heart or forcibly engage the attention. The words, 'My gracious silence', sufficiently explain Virgilia. The Induction of the

<sup>1</sup> *Imperfect Hints towards a New Edition of Sh.*, 1787.

*Shrew* is 'a delightful frolic of the poet's fancy'. The trial scene in the *Merchant* is not more to him than 'interesting'. He selects the passage on harmony as one of many to strengthen traditionary reports of Shakespeare's sweetness, benevolence, and goodness of heart. To this statement we relate one, that Shakespeare must be religious because of the Friar's speech to Juliet's parents on her supposed death. In contradiction to Mackenzie<sup>1</sup> he says that true love was never better painted than by Shakespeare in *M.N.D.* The said play gives scope for Shakespeare's visionary fancy and wild imagination. 'The magic of his muse has bodied forth things unknown, and he has transfused a portion of that divine spirit which nature gave him, to airy nothings—to whom he has given a charm that will never fade.' Falstaff's death is another instance of Shakespeare's humane and generous disposition. Henry V is amiable and noble, and evidently Shakespeare's favourite character. The balcony scene of *R. and J.* is finely delineated by the supreme master of the tender passions. The last scenes of this play are equal to any praise, and Shakespeare's poetry is inspiration indeed. He has made all his readers friends to the poor forlorn Apothecary. . . .

Felton has some penetrating remarks—on *Titus*, on Virgilia, on the Apothecary. The latter shows that he felt Shakespeare's power of making the most incidental characters live. It is a step in the right direction that he frequently alludes to Shakespeare's fancy and the 'wildness' of his imagination. Where he errs is in seeing Shakespeare's personal thoughts reflected in the sayings of his characters.

## XI

THOMAS ROBERTSON<sup>2</sup> describes Hamlet's character as a compound of many particular qualities: exceeding high elevation of soul, exquisite sensibility to virtue and vice, extreme gentleness of spirit and sweetness of disposition: with which were conjoined brilliant and cultivated talents, a vivid and strong imagination, with intuitive rather than acquired knowledge of mankind, and also singular gaiety of spirits. Perhaps Shakespeare had no preconceived plan, but, like a historian, recorded the deeds of this marvellously made-up being. He keeps in mind all his previous character, and, without adding a new feature, makes the new spring lineally from the old. There was neither violence, nor sorrow, nor melancholy, nor madness, in the original and natural state of his mind. The latitude of his character explains his conduct: he was at once a polished gentleman, soldier, scholar, philosopher. Because his qualities were oppositely balanced one set disabled the other: so he suffered nothing to be done. Being extraordinarily

<sup>1</sup> On Hamlet.

<sup>2</sup> *An Essay on the Character of Hamlet*, 1788 (Transactions of Royal Society of Edinburgh, vol. ii, 1790).

gentle he could not act in cold blood, and was not formed to act. The business of the tragedy hangs on the fluctuation of his mind between contriving and executing, between elevation, sensibility, and gentleness. He certainly loved Ophelia, though critics have blamed him for soon forgetting her—but it is the mark of a great soul on great occasions to outrun time. Only a great mind can make truce with sorrow, dismiss the deepest anguish, and put mirth in its stead. When he spares the King at prayer he is imposing on himself, and devising excuses for his dislike of bloodshed. He believed his old schoolfellows were guilty—and that they were his schoolfellows would aggravate their guilt, so hatred would succeed love, as Shakespeare knew well. He is the most splendid character in dramatic poetry, comprehending almost the whole of what is beautiful and grand. Critics have taken only partial views, and based his character upon sensibility, but neither this nor sense of virtue would excite tragic interest. It was his permanent quality of gentleness that impeded him from acting: and the struggle is between sensibility and gentleness. These speak in one breath when he says, 'The time is out of joint . . .'. Nor has justice been done to his sublimity of soul, whence sprang his sensibility. For the first time in history we see a man of genius on the stage. If the play has a fault it is in exciting little interest for the final event. Perhaps Shakespeare found Hamlet's character grow on him, and was distracted from his first design, and sacrificed all to the person rather than the plot. The effect is that Hamlet alone eclipses the whole action of the drama. We may or may not draw morals, but what most impresses is the charm of Hamlet's personal character. The best judge of the poet's purpose is the feelings of the spectators. . . .

We are more impressed by Robertson's instinct than his considered opinions. He divines truly that Hamlet is one and his actions another; and it is finely imagined that Shakespeare was led away from any pre-conceived plan by the charm of the character. Where we think he fails is in deliberate analysis of Hamlet's qualities. It is strange how powerless such abstract analysis is when its object is to explain inaction. To re-create Lear's self-willed past may help us to realize the rage against Cordelia of the old man whose whim had been thwarted; and Othello's African blood will partly explain his murderous impulse: but Hamlet's 'sensibility' and 'gentleness' advanced as reasons why he did nothing touch us not nearly. The individual is an incalculable force, beyond the qualities of which he is made up; and Robertson is more inspired when he says that for the first time we see a man of genius on the stage. He also provides the clinching argument against those who say that *Hamlet* cannot be understood: that it pleases its audience. However, the mystery of Shakespeare is now felt: the ornamental eighteenth-century groves are leading into the primeval forest.

## XII

MALONE'S essay on *Henry VI*<sup>1</sup> is worth a glance, because, in a limited way, it anticipates the modern 'disintegrators' of Shakespeare. He finds the hand of Shakespeare in the second and third parts, but is far from admitting that they were originally and entirely composed by him. They are unequal, with many of Shakespeare's traits, but the inferior parts differ from those of Shakespeare's undoubted works. Part I is probably the entire work of an old dramatist: also the *Contention*, out of the two parts of which Shakespeare formed his two plays. Part I has more allusions to mythology, classical authors, and ancient and modern history than any other of Shakespeare's works written on an English story—introduced like those of Greene, Peele, Lodge, &c., to show the writer's learning, not because they rise naturally out of the subject: e.g. 'Was Mahomet inspired with a dove?' 'I shall as famous be by this exploit, As Scythian Thomyris by Cyrus' death.' 'Where is the great Alcides of the field?' 'Thou may'st not wander in that labyrinth; There Minotaurs and ugly treasons lurk.' The words *proditor* and *immanity* occur in this piece and nowhere else in Shakespeare. The verse differs from Shakespeare's genuine dramas, and resembles the plays before his time. In the latter is a certain stately march of versification; the sense concludes or pauses almost uniformly at the end of every line; and the verse has scarcely ever a redundant syllable.

The internal proofs are that the author of Part I did not know how old Henry was when his father died. He nowhere expressly mentions his age, but supposes him beyond infancy: 'When I was young . . .' (iv. iv). He remembered some of his father's sayings; but Shakespeare knew he could not have done so. (Part II, Act IV, Sc. ix, and Part III, Act I, Sc. i.) The first of these is not in the *Contention*, and is one of Shakespeare's additions to the old play. The second—'When I was crown'd I was but nine months old'—is found in *The True Tragedie of Richard Duke of York*, and proves that *1 Henry VI* was written neither by the author of that tragedy nor by Shakespeare. In ii. v, Cambridge is said to have raised an army against Henry; but in *Henry V* Shakespeare represents the truth—that he conspired to assassinate him. These differing historical statements prove that the author of Part I was not the author of the first part of the *Contention*.

Part I has few rhymes and no alternate rhymes, both of which abound in Shakespeare's early plays: although this is true of Parts II and III. However, it may be that in working up the materials furnished by a preceding writer, Shakespeare followed his mode: and in the

<sup>1</sup> *Dissertation on Henry VI*, 1790 (vol. xviii of Boswell's edition of Malone's *Variorum Sh.*, 1821).



original plays there are few rhymes. The *Contention* and *True Tragedie* are probably by Peele and Greene.

In his genuine plays Shakespeare frequently borrows from himself—and in 2 and 3 *Henry VI* coincidences with his other works may be found. But these exist only in the Folio, not the Quarto, and only in those parts of these new-modelled pieces which were of Shakespeare's writing. On the other hand, certain passages that disagree in matters of fact from his other plays are proof that he did not compose them, and, since they are found in the original quarto plays, they were evidently composed by another writer. In Part III Warwick would marry his eldest daughter to Edward—who accepts; but later Clarence would marry the younger daughter Anne. Shakespeare here follows the old drama; but the fact is that Edward married Anne, and Clarence the elder: and when Shakespeare wrote *Richard III* he corrected this.

Such parts of 2 and 3 *Henry VI* as are found in the Folio only have a peculiar phraseology and versification. This applies not only to the new matter Shakespeare produced, but to his alteration of the old. The following inaccuracy is characteristic only of Shakespeare: when he quotes the same paper twice the second reading differs from the first. (Cf. Helena in *All's Well*, III. ii, and v. iii.) In 2 *Henry VI* I. i, Gloucester, reading the articles, is taken ill, and the Bishop re-reads differently: while in the *Contention* the article as recited by the Protector corresponds exactly with that recited by the Bishop. At times Shakespeare is inconsistent, through adhering to or deviating from his original. In Part II, Act iv, Sc. iv, Henry says, 'I'll send some holy bishop to entreat'. He took this from Holinshed, as the old play does not mention a bishop. In a subsequent scene he forgot the new matter which he had introduced in the former—and Clifford and Buckingham only parley with Cade as in the old play. A similar inaccuracy is in *R. and J.* In the poem Romeo laments his fate to the Friar; and the Friar afterwards reproves him for want of patience. In forming the corresponding scene Shakespeare has omitted Romeo's invective against his fate, but inadvertently copied the Friar's remonstrance as it lay before him: 'Why rail'st thou on thy birth?' . . .

Malone is not a fine aesthetic critic, but the above interests as a first hint at modern methods of 'disintegration'. Mention of such dramatists as Peele and Greene, and allusions to such verse-tests as the double ending, carry our minds forward to the days of Mr. J. M. Robertson.

### XIII

BISHOP THOMAS PERCY<sup>1</sup> is one of those better critics whose learning is touched with imagination. As he puts his principles into practice, he is himself his best commentator.

<sup>1</sup> *Essay on the Origin of the English Stage*, 1793.

He says that our modern tragedy sprang out of the graver sort of Moralities as our comedy from the lighter Interludes, but it was the old Mysteries that gave birth to the Historical Plays. These latter pieces differed from tragedies as much as historical poems from epic—as the *Pharsalia* from the *Aeneid*. Shakespeare did not invent species, but cultivated them with such success as to defy Aristotle and the critics of the Classical School, and ever to instruct and interest an English audience. He is the only historic dramatist who continues to hold the English stage. He himself and his contemporaries considered his histories a legitimate distinct species, separate from tragedy and comedy. This vindicates him against those critics who blame him for neglecting the unities and the classical dramatic forms. If the first canon of sound criticism is to examine a work by the rule which an author prescribed to himself, then we should not try Shakespeare's histories by the general laws of tragedy or comedy.<sup>1</sup>

## XIV

AS in Malone we saw a faint dawn of the methods of Mr. J. M. Robertson, so do we in James Plumptre<sup>2</sup> those of Miss Winstanley. He wishes to prove that, through Gertrude, Shakespeare indirectly censured Mary Queen of Scots. He argues that the Ghost never exculpates her from the murder, and she does not attempt to clear herself. That she is composed at the play proves her to be guilty; for the play itself and the King's behaviour should have affected her strongly. At least, why does she not break with Claudius and upbraid him after it is discovered? If Shakespeare meant her to be innocent he should have put it beyond a doubt. If she did not consent at the time, she was certainly not displeased later. The character of Hamlet is that of James I, but drawn in the fairest colours, with harsh features softened and deformities concealed. In most stage heroes we see one or two passions working; but Hamlet not only combines many passions and qualities, but those of an opposite kind.

## XV

WILLIAM RICHARDSON has crossed our pages before, but here is his more important work.<sup>3</sup> He calls Shakespeare 'Proteus of the drama', and his motive is that Shakespeare above all dramatists knew how to imitate the passions. We will omit his analyses of Macbeth, Hamlet, Jaques, Imogen, which are substantially the same as fourteen years previously, and pass on to Richard III, whom, he says, Shakespeare has made attractive by linking his vices with his qualities—that

<sup>1</sup> Carlyle, in his essay on Goethe (1828), says that a critic's first duty is to discover the author's aim.

<sup>2</sup> *Observations on Hamlet*, 1796; *Appendix*, 1797.

<sup>3</sup> *Essays on some of Sh.'s Dramatic Characters*, 1798.

is, intellectual qualities, for he has no moral. The spectator abhors his guilt, but admires his skill in using all mankind to forward his ambition. These two emotions produce neither pain nor pleasure in extreme, but agitate our minds delightfully. Because Richard is deformed he exerts himself the more, and by despising mere appearances he impresses us with his superior understanding. His deliberate guilt adds to his character the deeper shade that he is incapable of feeling. In the scene with Lady Anne his boldness astonishes and interests us in the event, so that we forget the improbability. He subdues and restores her soul to its ruling passion of vanity. He discriminates among his accomplices, and treats each according to his powers. It is not Richmond who brings him down, but his own enormous vices. We rejoice in his sufferings of conscience before the battle; and thus disagreeable objects may yield pleasure. Shakespeare contrasts good and bad characters; and the painful feeling is overcome by delightful emotions, yet retains its force, which it adds to the prevailing sensation.

Falstaff is ruled by the wish to gratify his grosser appetites, and he is a deliberate rather than a constitutional coward. He aspires to be thought worthy, as he needs the good will of his associates in order to enjoy himself, and therefore he boasts. His love of society is unconnected with friendship or affection, but, with his good humour, it makes him acceptable. He merely wishes to gratify appetite, and uses men for his purposes. He has imposed on others, and is now punished by being imposed on himself. The Prince was amused, not deceived, and so the catastrophe of his rejection is inevitable. Shakespeare was a sublime moralist, and represented Falstaff as incorrigible. He is a sensualist, totally lost, and unable to repent. Because the reader is amused, he attaches himself to the cause of it. The effect of the united feelings produced by Falstaff is stronger than if they had been single.

Lear is the man of mere sensibility, extravagant both in fondness and displeasure, whose feelings overrule his principles. Such persons expect returns equal to their own ardours, and at the best they are disappointed. We should disapprove of an extravagant, capricious man like Lear, but Shakespeare, as usual, skilfully blends the disagreeable qualities with circumstances that correct this impression. Lear learns from his misfortunes, and is led by them to the reformation which we approve. Timon is profuse, not from generosity, but love of distinction. His taste becomes vitiated, and he contracts a false appetite for adulation. When a once active principle is not confirmed by reason and conviction of duty, it becomes passive and lets others operate in its stead; and the passion which springs up in their place assumes their appearance and acts as they would have done. Inherent goodness is here subverted by love of distinction: the pleasure is in love of applause rather than native impulse. He does not give to the

afflicted, but to those who can proclaim his praises. When the disillusion comes he curses all mankind—but with more selfish passion than he thinks. Few dramatic characters have as much unity of design.

Character depends on situation, and women's duties are simpler than men's, yet Shakespeare's women are as various as we can expect. It has been objected that circumstances decide their characters, but Cordelia was situated like Regan and acted otherwise. Besides, to disregard such discrimination as proceeds from external condition is against nature.

Shakespeare's fault was one of consummate taste. He had no standard of dramatic excellence. He followed 'nature' rather than traditional laws of beauty. Hence he mixed tragedy and comedy, and used coarse language, instead of keeping the solemn apart from the ludicrous, and maintaining unity of passion, emotion, sentiment. The mind should be moved by one particular set of feelings, and now and then Shakespeare achieves this, as in the speech on death in *M. for M.* To exclude from tragedy mean persons and vulgar language is not to violate nature. Critics have used nature to express the real appearances of things, unimproved by human art. But the mind can conceive greater excellence than we have ever yet beheld. This does not belong to new objects, but to the improved state of familiar things. We cannot imagine a new human race, but we can the present one perfected. As to nature, a savage is more natural than a European. By culture of mind and improvement of external objects, we partly attain to the excellence which we conceive, and which is according to nature. It is not unnatural because it is only foreseen and not attained. Shakespeare faulted at times by attaching himself too strongly to real appearance. He also lacked critical and historical knowledge, and was careless of unity. Taste is perfect when it unites sensibility, discernment, and knowledge. Shakespeare possessed all the taste that depends on feeling, but his sensibility was exposed to perversion because he lacked the discernment of the philosophical or the knowledge of the learned critic. . . .

As said before, the interest of Richardson's criticism is seldom more than negative, 'because, in starting with the passions and working inward towards the individual, he seldom reaches the individual at all. We cannot honestly say that he helps us to understand either Lear, Falstaff, or Timon. On the other hand, we do learn something of Richard III, because we feel that the abstract qualities or defects, on which the critic dwells, have been somehow modified by the incalculable force of the individual. In conclusion, Richardson shows, by his remarks on tragi-comedy and mean persons introduced into tragedy, that he cannot appreciate Shakespeare as a whole. He commends certain parts, such as Claudio's speech on death in *M. for M.*, but evidently does not see how Lear's character is heightened by the Fool,

or the meaning added to *Hamlet* by the grave-digger scene. He is a philosophical critic, without imagination, who analyses only his immediate reactions to Shakespeare in the light of acquired knowledge. We agree with his saying that art should surpass nature; but the artist demands from his reader a corresponding effort; and Richardson is either disinclined to make it, or is prevented by the critical conditions of his age.

## XVI

ISAAC AMBROSE ECCLES<sup>1</sup> starts by sweeping away all precepts of Aristotle and rigid rules, and only aims to make the fable appear true to itself. A play depends on its plot, and we would esteem Shakespeare much more were not his plots so wild and irregular. Above all, he is careless with time—and Eccles suggests transposing scenes: otherwise beauty, passion, wise maxims, description have their effects weakened when no longer relatively subserving a coherent system or rationally adjusted plan. No beauties in a work of imagination can compensate for the violation not merely of probability, but of poetic possibility. Eccles shows some power to measure Lear's agony when he compares the effect on him of Cordelia's first artless answers with the conduct of Goneril and Regan. If his youngest daughter's 'most small fault'—as he himself afterwards called it—could move him so, how strongly must his passions work at the total disaffection of the others! It is not the loss of his kingdom on which he dwells, but the ingratitude of his children. Eccles then proceeds to lament that Shakespeare's wild genius made him injure the fable by introducing an underplot and so drawing off our affections from the principal object. But for this *Lear* might have been an object of envy to the united efforts of Greece: and yet he admits that the episode of Gloster is not entirely detached from the main object, and Edgar is an amiable character. He cannot yet understand Shakespeare's complex art, but describes better separate passions such as Lear's madness, which is the natural effect of such suffering on such a character. He speaks the language of Richardson when he says that Lear, extravagant, inconsistent, inconstant, capricious, variable, irresolute, and impetuously vindictive, is almost an object of disapprobation: but Shakespeare, with his usual skill, blends the disagreeable qualities with such circumstances as correct this effect and form one delightful assemblage. Lear, in his good intentions, was without deceit; his violence is not the effect of premeditated malignity: his weaknesses are not crimes, but often the effects of misruled affections; and he becomes more interesting towards the close of the drama because he really more deserves our esteem. He is nearer to the critic's first duty of experiencing beauty when he writes of *Cymbeline* that

<sup>1</sup> *The Plays of King Lear and Cymbeline*, 1801.

Shakespeare enchants us into forgetting its indecorums and incongruities, and we only perceive them by keeping our judgement on the watch and attending closely.

In his notes to the *Merchant* (1805) he revives the old controversy about music and morals, in the same literal way, and he quotes Malone's saying that 'Shakespeare is not always exact in his language'. Finally he agrees with Mason that though it is broadly true that no amiable man is deaf to harmony, it would be presumptuous to assert a scale of relative proportion between musical taste and moral sensibility, though it is possible Shakespeare may have meant internal harmony of mind.

## XVII

LORD CHEDWORTH (John Howe)<sup>1</sup> continues to wrangle with former commentators in interpreting Shakespeare literally. He justifies Portia's appeal to the Christian doctrine of salvation, addressed to Shylock, which some critics have blamed, since the Jewish Scriptures abound with passages recommending mercy. He says that Macbeth speaks of 'multitudinous seas' to denote the immensity of the sea, and to express in hyperbole how hard it was to wash the blood from his hand. The spiritual struggle, of which these words are a symbol, he ignores. So when he defends Macbeth's waverings against those critics who call them unnatural, he does so rather because they make an exciting scene than throw light on the deepest parts of human nature. He is for Iago, against Rymer, but will not suffer Warburton; because had there been no other soldier in the play but Iago the objection would not have been made.

## XVIII

E. H. SEYMOUR<sup>2</sup> writes with insight in his Introduction that all Shakespeare's plays are corrupt except *M.N.D.*, but that internal evidence reveals a peculiar and predominating style, and also an original design. His verse was as correct as that of Pope, whom he surpassed in true and various melody, and equal, if not superior, to Milton. It is to be noted that he excepts *M.N.D.*, which Mr. J. M. Robertson holds to be Shakespeare's first entire original play.

His remarks on the plays are argumentative rather than imaginative. He accepts Malone's opinion, before Dr. Johnson's, about the speech on death in *M. for M.*; but he agrees with Dr. Johnson that Isabella's words, 'Till he did look on me', showed womanly vanity. Here again he shows himself unaware of the electric atmosphere that surrounds Shakespeare's characters in times of crisis. Isabella would think only of the spiritual fact and utter it directly, unconcerned with her personal self.

<sup>1</sup> *Notes upon some of the Obscure Passages in Sh.'s Plays*, 1805.

<sup>2</sup> Vol. i, *Remarks Critical, Conjectural, and Explanatory upon the Plays of Sh.*, 1805.

Another controverted passage which he handles is that on music in the *Merchant*, and here he says more wisely that 'harmony' is of the sublimer kind which embraces the poetry and eloquence of which Plato approved. The first scene of *A.Y.L.* is not in Shakespeare's manner, but rather resembles Ben Jonson. He also concludes that the first scene of *Macbeth* is not genuine, because the witches are introduced only to say that they will meet again: in which he surely misses the whole atmosphere of the play. The meaning of 'Fair is foul . . .' is, 'Now shall confusion work, let the order of things be inverted . . .'. He finds Macbeth distinguished by an active and ardent imagination operating on the most exquisite sensibility, and the key to his character is his question, 'Do you not hope your children shall be kings?' Macbeth mistrusts Banquo, but cannot forbear sounding him—and his question begins where his meditation ended. This and his manner of explaining the speech, 'If it were done', shows that, although he recognizes Macbeth's imagination, the ideal is still 'truth to nature': that is, that the speaker must bring home to the audience his mental agitation by faithfully imitating its external forms. He blames the scene where the murderer appears in public with his blood-stained face, although he finds Shakespeare's manner in the scene: but surely he remembered that Macbeth had already seen the phantom dagger, and that the blood is not to be taken literally.

Unlike Dr. Johnson and Steevens he utterly rejects *1 Henry VI* as Shakespeare's, and agrees with Malone that Parts II and III were probably written by Greene, Lodge, Peele, or Marlowe—and by accident or design some of Shakespeare's improvements were introduced into the copy. Here he is at one with modern criticism; and he does suspect a second hand in *Henry VIII*—though it is that of Ben Jonson, and only in the Prologue and Epilogue. He also penetrates the outer layers of *T. and C.*, and says significantly that Shakespeare's genius and taste must have been exercised upon the work of some former writer.

Equally notable, in view of modern discoveries, is his saying that Brutus's speech in *Julius Caesar* is more like Ben Jonson than Shakespeare, and rather suitable to Polonius in those scenes of *Hamlet* where there is strong reason to suspect corruption.<sup>1</sup> He sees that *A. and C.* is a play of a finer type, and that its hero differs from the Antony of *J.C.* He defends Hamlet's actions, and points out that he was no pattern of purity or insipid perfection, but an instance of human frailty, nobly intending, but passionate, irresolute, capricious. He admits that *Hamlet* is Shakespeare's most popular play, yet finds in it impurities and interpolations, an indeterminate plot, and a hero irregular and censurable in morals, action, and behaviour. Against this he sets energetic

<sup>1</sup> Vol. ii, *Remarks on Plays of Sh. with extracts from MSS. of Lord Chedworth*, 1805.

writing, sentiments naturally introduced and happily expressed, and fascinating eloquence. He is better served by instinct when he says that Shakespeare must have altered the plan of the play; though it fails him again when he describes the ghost scene as an afterthought. He finally dismisses it as 'a prolix tragedy'.

He thinks *Timon* is in Shakespeare's happiest and noblest vein, and says justly of it, as he did of *T. and C.*, that Shakespeare was working on materials supplied originally by another hand. He admires *Othello* as much as *Macbeth*, or rather more, because it excites pity equally with terror. In *R. and J.* he points out a 'striking dissimilarity in dialogue': and this should be compared with his criticism of *Timon* and *T. and C.* He has made a remarkable divination that the work of one specially fine hand can be traced in a generally corrupt text.

## XIX

HENRY JAMES PYE<sup>1</sup> makes one remark that is worth noting: otherwise he is rather below the foregoing critics. He admits that, as regards conduct of fable, Shakespeare cannot pass the Aristotelian test, but, he says, 'the real breach of the unity of time (with which the unity of place is much connected) is when the precise time of action is marked, and events are made to take place in that time which could not possibly happen': e.g. in *Lear* the storm continues between two acts, yet the French army is raised in that time. He calls Shakespeare greater as poet than dramatist, unequalled in the terrific and sublime, but less able to excite pity than Otway and many inferior poets. He pays tribute to Shakespeare's knowledge of human nature, yet points out certain inconsistencies of character in *M. for M.* These are interesting as helping to confirm modern doubts that the play was not drafted by Shakespeare. He thinks that the death of Angelo should be respited by the unexpected appearance of Claudio, not by Isabella's uncharacteristic interference. Also Pompey and the Bawd are mildly treated at a time when the interest of the drama turns on fornication being punished with death. He reminds his readers that Shakespeare was a player as well as a poet, and probably more anxious for stage effect than the perfection of his drama as a composition.

## XX

ON one subject all the critics are agreed—Shakespeare's insight into character and passion. Malone says he has penetrated the inmost recesses of the human mind; Steevens and Felton, that he knows intimately and describes wonderfully every passion; Mackenzie, that he has absolute command over the passions and wonderful knowledge of nature; Davies, that his characters are the boast and honour of the

<sup>1</sup> *Comments on the Commentators of Sh.*, 1807.



English stage, fresh from nature's mint, yet such as no other writer has ever thought of, while no ancient or modern writer has excelled him in painting the passions; Richardson, that his power over the passions is unique among poets, and his skill in displaying character unrivalled; Eccles, that his characters were true and consistent, and he was rarely mistaken in human character and manners; Pye, that he excels in knowledge of human character and the human heart.

Mackenzie adds that if he was often careless of the structure of stories and probability of incidents, and broke the rules of the drama, it was so as to delineate the passions as they are in reality; and Steevens, Richardson, Felton, and Eccles describe him as irregular. If we extend this to style we get the following verdicts: from Malone, that his diction was uncommonly licentious; from Davies, that propriety of expression was not his principal study, and he frequently lays hold of the first word that meets his fancy. On the other hand, Seymour speaks of his vigorous and masterly style of composition, and says that his ear was as correctly tuned as Pope's, but far surpassing him in true and various melody, and equal if not superior even to Milton. And Pye says that he possessed every species of poetic excellence in a great degree.

We miss allusions to Shakespeare's philosophy, so we will just combine the following scattered remarks on the content of the plays. Ritson calls him the poet of nature, addicted to no system of bigotry. Davies says that he is against tyranny of kings, pride of nobles, turbulence of people. According to Mackenzie, good sense is his most conspicuous quality. Felton, alluding to Portia's speech, says that recommendation of mercy is Shakespeare's favourite subject; also, that no one so touched on the marvellous. Malone, to his remark already chronicled, that Shakespeare could penetrate the recesses of the mind, adds that he ranged through the wide fields of nature and often went beyond. Percy speaks of his genius for history; and Davies says that he is the most moral of ancient or modern dramatic writers. Pye calls him the complete ethic poet; while Richardson acclaims him as a sublime moralist, yet condemns him for lack of taste, which he ascribes to his want of learning and philosophy.

The following tributes are of a still more general kind. Malone calls his genius for the drama almost a gift from heaven. Steevens considers dramatic dialogue his great excellence. Mackenzie describes his powers of invention as almost supernatural, and credits him with the most prolific fancy and luxuriantly fertile imagination of all poets. Felton pays a like tribute to his visionary fancy and wild imagination. Davies says that he excels all in creative faculty. To Seymour he is an incomparable genius.

Two critics, Davies and Richardson, bear witness to the variety and originality of Shakespeare's women characters. Davies mentions that he has only five or six vicious characters of women. Capell says coldly

that because boys played women's parts Shakespeare has brought few women into his plays, and has made the characters of some trifling and unimportant, and put others into male disguise. . . .

It is obvious that in this last quarter of a century no notable critic has arisen. Mackenzie is the most inspired; but the trail blazed by Morgann has not been followed up. Shakespeare's command of verse is but half recognized, or mentioned to be dropped, and the depth of his philosophy is unsuspected. We still hear the complaint that he was wild and irregular and a breaker of rules: and there are few pertinent surmises that he was master of a more complex art. Only in his power to present characters are the critics universally agreed, but they praise him for realistic rather than imaginative achievement. On the other hand, when some of these critics rise from details to generalities, eulogies escape them which reveal the power with which Shakespeare has impressed himself on their minds. Their critical attitude, divided between praise and blame, and lacking the extreme reverence of the nineteenth century, is not unlike that of to-day—except that the modern critical instrument is more highly perfected. Coleridge had not yet written, to inaugurate the age of faith when Shakespeare could do no wrong, and to impress upon the world that his mind was among the mysteries of the universe. Some of the faults noted in the eighteenth century are suppressed in the nineteenth, to be revived in the twentieth—such as faults of construction—but they do not veil his true poetic power. They are like the extinguisher that Scrooge, in Dickens's story, pressed down upon the spirit, but could not hide the light, which streamed from under it in an unbroken flood upon the ground; or like the grains of volcanic dust whirled round the globe to make next year's sunset crimson in northern lands.

## Chapter VI

### GERMANY 1767-1813

I. LESSING. II. GOETHE. III. ESCHENBURG. IV. HERDER. V. GOETHE.  
VI. GARVE. VII. F. SCHLEGEL. VIII. ZIEGLER. IX. A. W. SCHLEGEL.  
X. GOETHE. XI. CONCLUSION.

#### I

G. E. LESSING<sup>1</sup> writing about Shakespeare's ghosts says that the seeds of possible belief are sown in all of us; it therefore depends on the degree of the poet's art whether he can force them to germinate. The ghost in *Hamlet* makes our hair stand on end, whether we are believers or sceptics: it appears really to come from another world, whereas Voltaire's ghost is but a disguised actor. Hamlet's mother does not see the ghost; all our attention is therefore fixed on him, and we estimate its reality by his agitation. Voltaire's ghost is a poetical machine; Shakespeare's, an active personage who can excite our pity as well as fear. The different point of view was that Voltaire looked upon the reappearance of a dead man as a miracle—Shakespeare, as a natural occurrence.

The spirit in Voltaire's *Zaïre* is gallantry: the only play dictated by love itself is *R. and J.* Orosman speaks like a jealous man, and commits a rash deed of jealousy, but he teaches us nothing of jealousy itself. Othello is a complete manual of jealousy, and we may learn from him all that refers to it and awakens it, and how we may avoid it.

One can no more deprive Homer of a verse than Hercules of his club: and this is true of Shakespeare. The least of his beauties has an impress which exclaims to all the world: 'I am Shakespeare's'. As a large fresco stands to a miniature painting, so does he compare with the tragedies of French taste. . . .

Lessing is aware of the reality of Shakespeare—his knowledge of the passions and the unique quality of his verse—and he also knows that Shakespeare needed a greater art to convey his philosophy. The drama, as practised by Voltaire, is hardly great enough to illustrate Shakespeare's genius by contrast, and yet Lessing uses it not unskillfully to bring home to us the wide Shakespearian sweep.

His later remarks,<sup>2</sup> in which his opinions are unchanged, are on two familiar themes—the greater likeness of Shakespeare's plays to the German than the French, and the contrast of Shakespeare with the ancients. He declares the French theatre to be unsuitable to the German mode of thought, and that past German dramatic works

<sup>1</sup> *Dramatic Notes (Hamburgische Dramaturgie)*, 1767-9, Nos. 11, 12, 15, 73. Trans. Helen Zimmern. (G. Bell & Sons, 1879.)

<sup>2</sup> *Antheil an den Litteratur-Briefen*, Letter 17, Part 16.

inclined more to the English than French taste. Germans desired more to see and think about than the timid French tragedy supplies. They are affected more deeply by the great, the frightful, and also by the melancholy, than by the petty and agreeable, the delicate and amorous. They are bored by too great simplicity and too much intrigue. Shakespeare's masterpieces, translated with some modest alterations, would be more to the taste of the German people than Corneille and Racine. They would quicken genius of a quite other kind; and genius is only enkindled by genius—especially that of one who relies on nature alone rather than arduously perfected art.

Shakespeare hardly knew the ancients, yet he is a far greater tragic poet than Corneille who knew them well. Corneille is nearer to them in mechanical arrangement, Shakespeare in essentials. Shakespeare nearly always achieves his tragic aim, though he may choose a strange and individual way—Corneille hardly ever, though he follows the beaten track of the ancients. After the *Oedipus* of Sophocles, no plays in the world have a more powerful effect on our passions than *Othello*, *Lear*, *Hamlet*. Voltaire's *Zaïre* moves us far more than any play of Corneille, and *Zaïre* is infinitely behind *Othello*, of which it is a feeble copy, and from which the whole character of Orosman was borrowed.

## II

THE first page of Shakespeare read by the young Goethe<sup>1</sup> made him a lifelong adherent. He felt his existence infinitely expanded, and the unities become irksome bonds. For him Shakespeare's plays seemed to revolve round that secret point which no philosopher has yet been able to see and to determine, where the peculiar quality of our *Ego*, the pretended freedom of the will, conflicts with the inevitable course of the whole. Shakespeare's characters are on a colossal scale: for which reason we fail to recognize them as our fellows. He gave them his own life, and himself speaks to us through their mouths. Our age is too artificial to judge the natural; but, through Shakespeare, nature herself utters her prophecies. . . .

Like Lessing Goethe was evidently impressed by Shakespeare's width and freedom, and he delights in the absence of the unities. It is the impression of one who has discovered something new in literature and life, and the original and elemental impression of a poet.

## III

JOHANN JOACHIM ESCHENBURG<sup>2</sup> compares Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* with Voltaire's. Shakespeare's Caesar makes no long speeches, but his few disjointed words reveal the imperious, unflinching

<sup>1</sup> *Stray Thoughts on Sh.*, 1771.

<sup>2</sup> *Versuch über Sh.'s Genie u. Schriften*, 1771.

man—as when he sets aside the dreamer who warns him of the Ides of March: whereas Voltaire's Caesar is troubled and anxious. The latter, when refused the crown, defies and threatens. Shakespeare's Caesar will not recall his decrees, and will have his commands irrevocably carried out, but is never petulant or defiant. Shakespeare follows Plutarch in making Caesar hesitate to go to the Senate House. Voltaire's Caesar goes because perverse obstinacy is his chief characteristic. According to Voltaire Caesar was an arbitrary, selfish tyrant, and a scold. He can awake in us neither interest nor fear. Historians have presented Caesar's character in a far more theatrically effective manner; and Shakespeare has copied them with masterly power.

Brutus, as conceived by Shakespeare and historians, is a character worthy of all respect. He has a noble but not a blind enthusiasm for his country's freedom. He never aims to withdraw himself from a world that he does not think worthy of him, but is set on helping his country, even if murder must be the means. Voltaire puts all that is attractive in Brutus under eclipse by concentrating on one feature of the plot that Shakespeare ignored: the fact that Brutus was the illegitimate son of Caesar. In the Brutus-Cassius quarrel scene Shakespeare reveals his most intimate knowledge of the human heart. With Voltaire, after Brutus is converted to the conspiracy, Cassius becomes his tool, and all contrast of character, so ably displayed by Shakespeare, is absent. The Antony of history and Shakespeare is malleable, feminine, voluptuous—but he changes his tone after Caesar's death. Voltaire makes him merely Caesar's confidant. He borrows the great oration from Shakespeare, but does not prepare it so well. In endeavouring to rouse the people he goes to work directly, not sinuously like Shakespeare's Antony. . . .

According to the critical fashion of his time Eschenburg disparages Voltaire to the gain of Shakespeare. He credits Shakespeare by contrast with knowledge of human nature, good taste, and even superior artistry, and also reality. We deduce the latter from his mention of Shakespeare side by side with the historians, against Voltaire's fanciful portraits of historic characters.

#### IV

J. G. VON HERDER<sup>1</sup> says that Shakespeare's enemies declare him to be a great poet but no dramatist—or, even if a dramatist, no equal to Sophocles, Euripides, Corneille, Voltaire. His foremost champions are content with the negative attitude of explanation and defence. This is not the right point of view, since it is impossible that Greece and the North should produce a similar drama. 'Illusion' sums up Aristotle's dictum; but where is there illusion in Corneille's heroes? They are dramatic fictions; while in Racine their emotion is seldom at first hand;

<sup>1</sup> *Von deutscher Art und Kunst*, 1773.

and Voltaire's utter the fine speeches of well-dressed men and women. Even in the Greek drama there is one predominating tone of character; whereas Shakespeare can arouse terror and pity in various ways. His concert is led by the mingled tones of all kinds, characters, classes, ways of life. There is no single high ethereal voice, but the voices of all ages, peoples, races. He is the interpreter of nature's many tongues. To read him is to forget theatre and actor, and be conscious only of storm-blown leaves from the book of life. His stage is continual wave after wave of happenings. Characters come and go, influence each other in spite of disparity, destroy themselves. All kinds of confusion and disorder are worked into the author's plan.

We detect in the first scene, where he stands before the map of his kingdom, the seeds of the future misery of the rashly generous, nobly weak Lear. The accumulating tragedy is no mere tale, but the human spirit is alive through it all, and gives each character its place in the picture. The mingled strangeness of scenes and encounters—Gloster and Edgar, Lear and Cordelia—motives, collateral circumstances, are all brought to an ordered close. Soul breathes through all places, times, circumstances. There is a brooding fate, all fits into the whole, and nothing needs to be changed. Is Shakespeare, then, no dramatic poet? His drama is wide and deep as nature; and the creator gives eye and point of view to enable us to see so far and deep. And so with *Othello* and *Macbeth*.

Time and place are idealized to aid in the illusion, because no man is indifferent to his external surroundings in the moving moments of life. Shakespeare chose scenes and times which most accorded with the whole feeling of the action. The opening scenes in *Macbeth* and *Hamlet* set the tune to the ensuing tragedies. This individualizing of prophetic atmosphere, time, place, and action runs through all the plays. The dominating passion of each throbs like the pulse of the universal soul through every speech, action, and external scene. In *Othello* sea-storm and wild love, death-song and the souging of the wind are all part of the same tragic world. Nature is involved in the human story: take anything away of time, place, consistency, and you take away breath and soul. It is thus with tragedy and comedy. Shakespeare outwardly differs from Sophocles, but is his true brother. Sophocles is true to nature with his unity of time, place, and action. Shakespeare can only be true to her when he deals with the whole world of human events and human fate, and takes all place and time for setting. . . .

The gist of Herder's criticism is the same—that Shakespeare is free and universal and not deficient in art. He is more skilled as a critic than those who came before him, a greater adept in the comparative method. And he goes a step further in showing the true nature of Shakespeare's art—no mechanical unity, but the power of the mind to make time

and place and event and character subserve the central idea. He has the qualities of the defects of his race—their lesser instinct for form compared with the English and French. This enables him to approach Shakespeare with a disinterested mind, not seek to rivet upon him the fetters of an unnatural art-form. As a reward, he is absorbed for the moment into Shakespeare's mind, and, on emerging, can bear witness to heavenly harmonies.

GOETHE'S most celebrated Shakespeare criticism, on the character of Hamlet, from *Wilhelm Meister* (1796) is now before us. He finds it impossible to retain a broad conception of the whole: now the characters, now their expression seem contradictory. Hamlet was of delicate and noble birth, and had grown up with regard for virtue, a perception of his princely worth, and an appreciation of all that was good and dignified, together with consciousness of his exalted birth. His love for Ophelia expressed silently his gentle desire; he was not by nature inclined to knightly pursuits, but required the spur of praise given to a rival. He was not ambitious, but now finds that his uncle had excluded him from the throne. He considers himself every one's servant, and is degraded and needy instead of courteous and condescending. Obsessed by his own nothingness he suffers the second, harder blow of his mother's marriage. She is also lost to him, through a crueller fate than death. Sorrow and reflection are now a heavy burden for one not naturally sorrowful or reflective. Then comes the Ghost's revelation, and the result is amazement and perplexity. This is the key: Shakespeare's wish to portray a great task imposed upon a soul which is incompetent to perform that task: as if an oak were planted in a costly vase that should contain only beautiful flowers, and the effect is that the roots expand and shatter the vase. A lovable, pure, noble, and highly moral being, without the force of will that makes a hero, is crushed beneath a load which he can neither bear nor cast off. All duties are sacred to him, but this alone he cannot perform. He turns and winds about in anxiety till at last he almost loses sight of his original purpose.

A few master-strokes complete the character of Ophelia. Her whole existence flows in sweet and ripe sensation. Decorum betrays rather than hides the gentle motions of her heart. Should the easy goddess, Opportunity, shake the tree the fruit would fall. When forsaken her heart breaks—and this, followed by her father's death, ruins the beautiful structure.

Even the English admit that the main interest closes with Act III, and the play is heavy and drags at the end. But instead of finding fault with the play's construction, we will maintain that a greater one has never been devised. Indeed, it is nature, not artifice. We see a fearful

crime bearing guilty and guiltless along in its train: since crime does harm the innocent, even as virtue extends blessings to the undeserving. Circumstances conspire to invoke revenge, but no power can execute that which is reserved for Fate alone. But the hour of judgement arrives: good and bad fall together, and a whole race is mowed down.

There are two divisions in the composition of the play: the principal internal relations of the persons and incidents, and the powerful effects which proceed from the characters and actions of the chief figures. Secondly, the external incidents whereby the persons are brought from place to place or become united by accident. These threads, though delicate, unite the play and prevent it from becoming disconnected. Fortinbras, the embassy, Hamlet and Horatio and Wittenberg, Laertes and Paris, Hamlet and the pirates, the death of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern—all these mar the unity of the play where, as it is, the hero acts without plan: and all might have been omitted in favour of the disturbances in Norway. Certain external circumstances are essential, but they should be more simple. If a large yet simple view of the fleet and Norway be left out altogether you have nothing but a mere family scene; whilst the grand idea of an entire royal house perishing from the effects of internal vice and crime would not be portrayed with the necessary dignity. . . .

We no longer accept Goethe's view of Hamlet as a delicate and retiring prince, who could not act; but it influenced many generations of critics, and is therefore historically important. Probably Goethe formed his opinion by concentrating upon the soliloquies, till their outer meaning affected him disproportionately. The theory of the oak-tree and the costly vase shares the fate of all theories. To impose a preconceived idea on a poet—on one in whom matter and form are inseparable—is to be once removed from critical reality. He shows great insight into Ophelia; and he has a remarkable sentence on Rosencrantz and Guildenstern: that if combined in one, the sense and effect would go—that one individual cannot represent their spirit, that they are only effectual in society, and constitute society. He points out certain structural faults in the play—an unconscious protest at the divided nature of its incidents and its psychology, as revealed by modern criticism.

## VI

CHRISTOPHER GARVE<sup>1</sup> compares Shakespeare with Michael Angelo in his love of depicting the grand, verging on the monstrous. Hence extreme passions such as Lear's rage, Othello's jealousy, Macbeth's ambition, Hamlet's thirst for revenge. Through the mouths of the irresponsible he can express his own philosophy, because the insane are not reticent, as are the sane. Greatest and most philosophical

<sup>1</sup> *Sh.'s Madmen and Fools*, 1796 (Collected Works, vol. ii, Breslau, 1801).



of poets, he delights in characters hovering on the border-land of insanity.

Hamlet's whole way of thinking is imaginative and fantastic; he lives in a world of ideas, and there is a certain connexion between his sound and unsound mind. This connexion does not appear with Ophelia; we hear little of her passion for Hamlet, and all we see is her obedience to her father. Two actually insane characters in a play would be inadmissible; but although Hamlet's madness is feigned, at times he speaks and behaves like a man of really shattered wits. But neither is there sufficient cause for real madness, nor could a real madman achieve the self-mastery that pretended madness requires. We therefore think the mingling of sanity and insanity in Hamlet too great a deviation from nature and truth. . . .

Garve is not a subtle critic, as we see from such a remark as Hamlet's 'thirst for revenge', and he inclines to be literal rather than penetrating—e.g. Ophelia. But he helps us to realize the elemental force in Shakespeare by dwelling on the kind of characters most fitted to express extreme passions.

## VII

FRIEDRICH SCHLEGEL<sup>1</sup> calls *Hamlet* one of the most characteristic specimens of modern poetry, and it appears to him much misunderstood. Critics have praised it in parts, have merely tolerated it, and called it unconnected as a whole. Above all, Shakespeare's dramas cohere, but the ground of connexion is often deeply hidden, the links are invisible, and the references fine enough to deceive the keenest critical analysis. Every single part of *Hamlet* radiates from a central point, and again reacts upon that point. Nothing alien, superfluous, or accidental has a place—and the central point is Hamlet's character. An unusual situation concentrates all the forces of this noble nature in the mind and extinguishes the active powers. His whole nature is on the rack, he is torn asunder, and goes under in a superfluity of vacuous thought. He is the completest picture of the insoluble disharmony which is the essential subject of philosophic tragedy, as the boundless disproportion of the thinking and active self shown in Hamlet's character. The total impression of the tragedy is the maximum of despair. All impressions which appear singly important vanish before what here appears as the final and only outcome of all being and thinking—the everlasting, colossal dissonance between man and his fate. What is here and there scattered in other plays appears in *Hamlet* as a whole.

Shakespeare perfectly embodied the characteristic spirit of modern poetry. He combined the most charming blossoms of romantic imagination, the huge grandeur of the Gothic heroic age, with the most

<sup>1</sup> *The Greeks and Romans*, 1797.

refined features of modern sociability, profound art, and copious poetic philosophy. In the two last he seems to anticipate modern culture. He is inexhaustibly interesting, and unsurpassed in force of passion and truth of characterization.

The general verdict that he sins against the rules of art is premature as long as no objective theory exists. He knows how to interest the crowd, though it is doubtful if the bulk of the people can grasp his philosophical spirit. He does not only present the beautiful, but in him, as in nature, the beautiful and ugly commingle. No one of his dramas is beautiful in the mass; the order of the whole is not determined by the beautiful; and even single beauties are not always free from ugly additions, but are the means to some further aim, such as character or philosophic interest. Often complications and entanglements make of the whole a continual strife. With the lightest-hearted characters, the unrestrained child and gay youth wound us with a bitter reminder of the aimlessness of life and emptiness of all being. He shirks nothing repugnant, rebellious, dull, horrible, so long as the representation requires it. He often flays his subject and probes with anatomical knife the hideous corruption of the moral corpse. One cannot say that he shows us the whole pure truth. He gives only a one-sided view, though it may be the most comprehensive. His expression is mannered, never objective, but his mannerism is the finest and his individuality the most interesting yet known. His characteristic art and manner are inseparable—and 'manner' means an individual trend of mind and tone of feeling expressed in necessarily idealistic creative work. . . .

Like Herder, F. Schlegel dismisses the notion that art is trick or artifice, and helps us to realize that it proceeds from the soul, that a great play cannot be 'inartistic'. The laws of art are not consciously made by critics, but are discovered from the intuitive practice of artists. The best part of F. Schlegel's criticism is his description of the economy of *Hamlet*—its parts subdued to the central control of the hero's mind. But in saying that the total impression of the tragedy is one of despair, we think that he has abandoned the aesthetic for the logical. His remarks on Shakespeare's style at first seem to call for contradiction: viz. that his view, though the most comprehensive, is nevertheless one-sided, and that his expression is more mannered than objective. But we think of *Timon*, *M. for M.*, and *T. and C.*, and hold our peace.

## VIII

F. W. ZIEGLER<sup>1</sup> finds that Hamlet is no criminal, but he dies weakly, whereas Laertes, who is a criminal, dies like a man. That Hamlet uses the poisoned rapier and cup to kill the King, not his own sword, shows a man overcome with despair, not a bold man. Shakespeare

<sup>1</sup> *Hamlet's Character Analysed*, 1803.

therefore did not wish to make either a hero or heroic character. He enlists pity, not admiration. He uses learning and cunning to prolong his life and attain the crown, but cannot escape fate, and ends his life as the crown falls from the usurper's head. Shakespeare intended to show the victory of pitiless Fate.

Physically Hamlet was of melancholic temperament. He knew from the beginning that his father had been murdered: for when a king died suddenly it implied murder. No doubt he hungered for revenge, after the Ghost's revelations, but immediate revenge was impossible. The King was well guarded; therefore Hamlet relieved his feelings by hanging him in his tablets: though writing by night in his tablets was unlikely. With an army he would have accomplished his revenge; but it was against his birth and upbringing to undertake it alone. Under the circumstances his behaviour seems natural. If the King betrays his guilt at the play he must plunge his sword into the murderer's heart; but then—even if the royal guards do not cut him down immediately—he must justify his action before a properly constituted court. He could hardly justify himself legally, even if Horatio and Marcellus had seen the Ghost. If his mother wishes to save him he would put her in a hideous position; and if she tries to screen herself he has everything to fear. Surrounded by peril, he reflects despairingly on life and death—not suicide, but the chances of death in attempting to kill the King.

He treats Ophelia as he does because she had visited him privately without a chaperon. He shows great presence of mind in crying, 'A rat!' when he kills Polonius, so that the Queen could testify he did not intend to kill a human being. Certainly Ophelia's behaviour to the melancholy Hamlet does not raise her in our esteem. She returns his letters and presents, and then appears without a female attendant, and reproaches him undeservedly. His love, however, turns a half-amused bitterness into a well-meant warning. From the cradle he had been softly reared, and now he must hazard all for revenge. Those who had flattered him as the heir now abandon him for the usurper. He was in daily care for his freedom and life, and so becomes the prey to deteriorating and bewildering forces. He clings to the only one from whose womanly nature he can expect nothing evil: and then, suddenly forbidden her presence, he loses all. Destruction goes on within him, though he will hide his soul if he can.

The scene where he spares the King at prayer makes us shudder at the ferocity that drives revenge so far. But the true cause is cowardice; and therefore Shakespeare would not have given so many evidences of cowardice had he wished to show Hamlet a hero. His only determined act was to meet the Ghost; and now the consequences of murdering the King rise up before his indecisive soul. He is ashamed to be thus undecided, and so feigns to be cruel in a devilish manner, that he may not again have to call himself a coward. Lest he should be found with

drawn sword behind the praying King he quickly sheathes it. Hamlet's character, inferred from the only true test of action, is morally weak, ambitious, and revengeful. . . .

It is needless to say that this is the literal criticism of a prosaist, to whom a sense of humour is denied, and has only a historic interest. It is unnecessary to take his argument seriously, but we note that he follows Garve in describing Hamlet as revengeful, and he anticipates Werder in dwelling upon the external difficulties of Hamlet's task.

## IX

A. W. SCHLEGEL<sup>1</sup> says that Greek art and poetry express the consciousness of the harmony of the faculties. Their civilization was a refined and ennobled sensuality; but religion is the root of human existence, and new-shapes the whole system of the mental faculties and feelings. Christianity rejuvenated the ancient world from exhaustion and debasement. Ancient poetry is that of enjoyment, ours of desire: the contrast of the present scene with recollection and hope. The Greeks believed that all the powers might be perfectly united—the moderns in an internal discord which makes such an ideal impossible.

The principle of antique poetry was ideal, that of romantic poetry mystical. Greek dramatic art was original and native, and had a living and powerful effect; but it ended when the Alexandrian poets began learnedly and critically to compose dramas after the model of great writers. The Romans imitated the Greeks without attempting to express their own way of thinking. In modern times only England and Spain possess an original and national theatre. The drama of both was romantic, and there were striking features of affinity between the theatres of the two widely differing nations. Not only did both neglect Time and Place unities and mingle comic and tragic, but the same spirit of romantic poetry uttered itself in dramatic shape. Spain, however, continued entirely romantic to the beginning of the eighteenth century: England was only completely romantic in Shakespeare. Ancient poetry severely separated dissimilar things, but romantic poetry delights to blend intimately nature and art, verse and prose, seriousness and mirth, recollection and anticipation, spirituality and sensuality, the earthly and heavenly, life and death. It approaches nearer to the secret of the universe—the chaos in the bosom of order.

Shakespeare was the idol of his contemporaries, but his fame was obscured in the days of Puritanism, and also in the reign of Charles II. It shone forth with more than its original brightness at the beginning of the eighteenth century, and has increased since and will for centuries. His contemporaries knew well the treasure they possessed in

<sup>1</sup> *Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature*, 1808, 1811. (Trans. John Black, Bohn, 1861.)

him—and they understood him better than most of those who succeeded him. The society of his day was without artificial polish, but full of healthy vigour. The age was not barbarous—and Shakespeare was chaste and moral compared to other poets. He had a little classical knowledge, and extensive acquaintance with English books. He knew enough mythology to employ it as symbolical ornament. He had a correct notion of the spirit of ancient history—and the history of England was familiar to him in detail. He was a nice observer of nature, and knew the technical language of mechanics and artisans. He was well travelled in England, and had inquired diligently of navigators concerning foreign countries. He thus knew the popular usages, opinions, and traditions that would serve in poetry. He intended his anachronisms, because he had not to do with a hypercritical audience always seeking in poetry for something else than poetry.

He was a profound artist, not a blind and wildly luxuriant genius. All admit that he has reflected deeply on character, passion, progress of events and human destinies, the human constitution, and all the things and relations of the world. Had he then no thought to spare for the structure of his plays? A drama depends on the relation of parts; and the progress of the main action requires even more thought than the composition of individual character and situations. The observer of men notes the mind's fainter and involuntary utterances, and uses his experience and reflection to express the meaning of these in signs; but he who really knows men draws further conclusions from these, and arranges his separate observations into a system. The dramatic poet who acts and speaks in the name of every individual is the plenipotentiary of the whole human race. The characters act as if unconscious of spectators: and yet the poet lets his audience into the secret of their minds. Shakespeare does not abolish individuality by supplying motives, and so resolving character into effect of external influences. He grasps every kind of character—king, beggar, hero, idiot, Romans, French, historical English, southern Europeans, Normans, ghosts, witches, fairies, sylphs, abortions—and makes them credible. His characters have individual peculiarities, but also significance beyond themselves. They supply materials for a profound theory of their most prominent and distinguishing property. He gives us the history of minds; he so combines characters that they bring out each other's peculiarities. Each character is the glass in which the others are reflected. His is the secret irony that comes from seeing human nature through and through. The result is a certain cool indifference—but that of a superior mind. Comic characters and scenes express his ironic view of life; they afford relief, and are not inserted to humour the taste of the multitude. The raillery of servants affords insight into the circumstances of their masters. Shakespeare's language is from life itself, and he exhausts all the means and appliances of language. He

observes nice distinctions in verse and prose according to the speaker's rank. The advantage of blank verse is that it can be elevated or lowered; and he makes a skilful use of rhyme. He has no mannerisms,<sup>1</sup> but is a Proteus, and also a correct poet, forming his whole work, to the minutest part, according to a leading idea, and animating by one spirit his means of execution.

The true significance of *M. for M.* is the triumph of mercy over strict justice. No man is himself so free from errors as to be entitled to deal it out to his equals. Shylock possesses strongly marked and original individuality, with a light touch of Judaism in all he says or does. The national stamp is emphasized by passion. He is a man of information, even a thinker, but has not discovered the region where human feelings dwell. His morality is founded on disbelief in goodness and magnanimity. Justice recoils on his head, and he thus becomes a symbol of the general history of his unfortunate nation. In *Twelfth-Night*, as in most of his plays, Shakespeare treats love more as an affair of the imagination than the heart. *M.N.D.* presents the fairies, whose most violent rage dissolves in good-natured raillery, whose passions, stripped of all earthly matter, are merely an ideal dream. To correspond, the loves of mortals appear as a poetical enchantment, which, by a contrary enchantment, may be immediately suspended and then renewed again. Caliban (*Tempest*) is a poetical being in his way. Though hateful, he is not hurtful to our feelings, as the honour of human nature is left untouched. Ariel reveals a profound view of the inward life of nature and her mysterious springs, never unknown to the genuine poet.

*R. and J.* is a picture of love and its pitiable fate in a world too sharp for this tenderest blossom of human life. It is a song of praise on the inexpressible feeling which ennobles the soul and elevates even sense into soul. The contrasts are blended into unity of impression, and the echo left in the mind resembles a single but endless sigh. Othello's jealousy is of that sensual kind which, in burning climes, has caused the disgraceful confinement of women. The mere physical force of passion puts to flight his acquired virtues and exalts the savage over the moral man. He suffers doubly, in the higher and lower sphere of his divided being. It seems like an unfortunate affinity, yet founded in nature, that Iago's influence over him expels Desdemona's. The repugnance which Iago's aims inspire would be intolerable for the spectator were not his attention diverted to the means, and his understanding endlessly employed in consequence. Iago sees only the hateful side, and so rudely dissolves the charm which the imagination casts over the relation between the sexes. He wishes to revolt Othello's senses, whose heart might otherwise have convinced him that Desdemona was innocent. It is great art that she never thinks it possible

<sup>1</sup> Cf. F. Schlegel.

she should be suspected. The force of the catastrophe is overwhelming—the pressure of feelings which measure out in a moment the abysses of eternity.

The foundation of *Hamlet* is unfathomably deep—yet the whole first appears of popular character. Hamlet is not solely impelled by necessity, but is inclined by nature to crooked ways. He is a hypocrite to himself, and his far-fetched scruples are often mere pretexts to cover his want of determination. He has a malicious joy in getting rid of Polonius, Rosencrantz, and Guildenstern. In introducing the witches into *Macbeth* Shakespeare was building on the foundation of superstition in human nature—that dread of the unknown, presage of a dark side of nature, and a world of spirits which philosophy thinks it has exploded. He paints a sublime picture of an ambitious but noble hero, yielding to a deep-laid, hellish temptation—one whose crimes cannot wholly root out the stamp of native heroism. We abhor his actions, yet pity his state of mind. Even in the end we admire the struggle of a brave will with a cowardly conscience. Shakespeare wishes to show that the conflict of good and evil in this world can only take place by the will of Providence, who converts the curse individuals draw down on their heads into a blessing to others. The compression is enormous—and the inmost recesses in the minds of the persons are laid open. Nothing can equal this picture in its power to excite terror. In *Lear*, which exhausts our compassion, we see a fall from height to abyss where humanity is stripped of all external and internal advantages and given up a prey to naked helplessness. The episode of Gloster and his sons helps the denouement and therefore does not destroy unity. That two such unheard-of examples should take place at the same time appears like a great commotion in the moral world. The picture is gigantic, and alarms us as if we thought the heavenly bodies might one day fall from their orbits. The guilty are punished, for wickedness destroys itself, but the virtues that would save are too late, or outdone by malice. The persons believe but faintly in Providence, as heathens do; and Shakespeare would show us that this belief must extend beyond earth's dark pilgrimage.

The last three tragedies seem to surpass the powers of human nature. The three Roman plays conceal art while appearing to adhere artlessly to history. Shakespeare seized the poetical point of view of historical transactions, and unified historic events without changing them. In *J. C.* Brutus is the hero, but Cassius is before him in will and practical judgement. Caesar is blamed for boasting, but we never see him in action, so cannot otherwise measure his greatness. His shade is stronger to avenge his fall than guard against it. *A. and C.* is a crowded extract and living development of history. A work of art should contain within itself everything needed for the full understanding of it. Many important things are only alluded to; but the principal characters are

powerfully drawn. The passion of the two lacks dignity, but excites our sympathy, as an insurmountable fascination. As they die for each other we forgive them having lived for each other. Both Timon's parts—his liberality and seclusion—show the wish to be singular. Shakespeare's peculiar wit, and some guile in character-drawing, appears in *T. and C.* It is a satire on the tale of Troy, and gives contrast of laziness and discord with noble descriptions and sage maxims.

The histories are a great whole, and faithfully exhibit the chief features of events, their causes, and secret springs, so that we get a true knowledge of history, and also a living picture on our imagination. They are a mirror of kings, into which young princes should look. Henry IV's jealousy of his brilliant son caused the latter to give himself up to dissolute society. Henry V's war with France—undertaken to consolidate his throne—was glorious, but more ruinous than profitable. *John* is a kind of Prologue, with wars and treaties, influence of clergy, factions of nobles. *Henry VIII* is the Epilogue, marking transition to modern Europe, with its refined court life and milder but no less unjust and cruel despotism. The events in *John* have solemn pomp because little true grandeur. Falconbridge wittily interprets the falsehood and selfishness. But when amid disguises and insincerities human nature is shown without a veil, the impression is deeper: e.g. the scene between John and Hubert. Richard II's nature is obscured by levity, but when he loses the earthly crown he appears a true king. In Henry IV is hardness, moderation, prudence. The Prince is unharmed by bad company, and his wildest freaks appear witty tricks to beguile forced inactivity. In Part II Shakespeare has overcome scanty matter by great art. Falstaff is the crown of Shakespeare's comic invention—and a more agreeable knave was never portrayed. With all his faults—including cowardice, dishonesty, and lying—he never disgusts us. He is without malice, and has humour and an acute mind. Henry V is Shakespeare's national hero: but war is epic rather than dramatic, because of chance. Drama should show us those determinations which, with some necessity, issue from the relations of individuals, their characters and passions: e.g. Macbeth's glory is heightened by the early battles. With Shakespeare the issue becomes one of a higher volition: a just cause and faith in heaven heartens one party, while the presage of a curse weighs down the other. The genius that wrote *Henry VI* is immature, but in its full strength. Has any other poet drawn aside the curtain of eternity at the close of life with more awful effect than Shakespeare in the death of Cardinal Beaufort? Richard III is a self-conscious villain, like Iago; and though this may seem against nature, the poet in soliloquies may voice the most hidden thoughts. We abhor Richard, but admire his skill and wit and presence of mind. His honourable death contradicts our moral feelings, but in the apparitions



Shakespeare observes true poetic justice. They reveal the invisible blessing or curse which hangs over human sentiments and actions. . . .

A. W. Schlegel sounds the note of modern criticism, like Coleridge, to whom his work has often been compared. He puts an end to false comparisons between Shakespeare and the ancients by distinguishing between ancient and modern poetry. Christianity, he says, rejuvenated an exhausted world, and transformed the motive of poetry from enjoyment to desire. It was necessary to draw this distinction in order to realize the infinitely more complex matter that Shakespeare converted into art, but it must not be accepted too literally. Art is concrete, and the most mystical poet cannot lack pagan delight in the beautiful outer world. In the same way it was commonly thought that classical poetry cared more for outward form than romantic, till W. P. Ker reminded the world that this could not be, since the romantic poet was devoted to the ideal of beauty.<sup>1</sup> We only need recall certain passages in the *Odyssey*, certain idylls of Theocritus, the laments of Bion and Moschus, certain lines of Virgil and Catullus, even of Horace, to assure ourselves that the ancient poets did not live always in the present, that their souls knew unappeased yearnings which they expressed rhythmically if not articulately. A. W. Schlegel, therefore, is right to dwell upon the larger world which Shakespeare had to encompass with the girdle of art, but wrong to imply that the difference was of kind rather than degree. A wiser, sadder, more complex world was Shakespeare's heritage—but the soul from its poetic beginnings has had its growing-pains.

Modern criticism has partially reconciled the quarrel between classical and romantic by deciding that they shade insensibly into each other. It was characteristic of A. W. Schlegel's time that rules were fixed and distinctions absolute. For the present, with his theory in mind, we need only point out some instances where it has helped or hindered him in appreciating the several plays. At the outset it is true that the unities could serve no purpose in Shakespeare's vaster scheme, but he is none the less a consummate artist. It is finely said that Othello suffers doubly, and that Desdemona's innocence extended to her self-consciousness; but foolishly (we think) that Hamlet took a malicious joy in getting rid of Polonius and the others. The best sentence about *Macbeth* is that we abhor his actions yet pity his state of mind. And when he forgives Antony and Cleopatra for having lived for each other because they die for each other, it finds an echo in our hearts. On the other hand, we do not think he has the right to say that Henry IV was jealous of his son, or to praise, as he does, Henry VI.

Of the general spirit of his criticism we may say that it suggests the lecture room. His appreciation of Shakespeare grows out of his wide knowledge of the literatures of many countries. His intellect works

<sup>1</sup> *Collected Essays* (1925), ii. 335.

rather than his soul; he has not taken Shakespeare home to his daily life, as Coleridge has done. The last impression is that Shakespeare performed a miracle in eclipsing other dramatists, not in penetrating the absolute mysteries. But when he deals with the question of form we do feel the urge of his whole nature, as we did Herder's. Belonging to a younger culture, he can understand naturally Shakespeare's wider artistry, without need to suppress inherited Aristotelian prejudices.

## X

IT seems to Goethe<sup>1</sup> that, as poet in general, scarcely any one has viewed the world as clearly as Shakespeare, or made himself and his readers more conscious of the world. He brings us by a means that we do not know face to face with virtue and vice, greatness and meanness. Addressing our inner sense, he makes it vivify the picture world of our imagination. His plays contain less sensuous action than spiritual word; his events are better imagined than beheld: e.g. the Ghost in *Hamlet*, the witches in *Macbeth*. All that is secretly floating in the air when a mighty event comes to pass, or is hidden in man's heart at the moment of a great catastrophe, is revealed to us. He divulges the secret of the spirit of the world, and also makes the inanimate world serve: phenomena of the sky, &c. Everywhere we behold England, and the development—or even misdevelopment—of the noble and momentous times in which he lived, serenely represented. He disregarded man's outer texture, but well knew his inner: his Romans were incarnate Englishmen. We disregard his anachronisms, because the fact that he violates external rules of costume makes his works life-like. Each of his works has a different conception: in *Coriolanus* it is chagrin at the mob's refusal to recognize the choice of its betters; in *J.C.* the leaders are averse to see the highest place filled, because they think wrongly they can co-operate successfully; in *A. and C.* idle enjoyment is incompatible with a life of activity.

Shakespeare's interest is in the world; the basis of his work is truth and solidity of life. He is not a romantic poet, but his value rests mainly on the present, and he rarely borders on the side of tenderness. Yet between him and the ancients is a wide gap, both in form and profound inner significance. Men's greatest miseries arise from disproportion between constraints and inclinations, then constraints and achievements, and inclinations and achievements. The ancients stressed the disproportion between constraint and achievement, the moderns between inclination and achievement. A man's constraints are forced upon him, but his inclinations are self-imposed: his will is his bliss. Perpetual constraint is burdensome, and inability to achieve one's end distressing—while constant inclination is pleasing, and a firm will may

<sup>1</sup> *Sh. and No End*, 1813.

make a man forget that he cannot achieve his aim. Ancient tragedy is founded on the idea of inevitable constraint—which opposite inclination only intensifies. The constraint of *Antigone* is less severe than *Oedipus*, and appears like a duty. Constraints are despotic; and the thought makes us shudder till we reflect that the good of the whole is the object in view.

Constraint makes tragedy great and powerful—inclination weak and petty. Shakespeare uniquely combines the characteristics of ancients and moderns. He preserves the balance between constraint and inclination, and always keeps inclination at a disadvantage. As a character a person *must* take a certain course, but as a man he has his inclinations. The result is internal conflict, and external conflict is added—more intense because inadequate inclination conflicts with incessant constraint. Hamlet, Macbeth, and Brutus are forced into a dilemma they cannot cope with. Inclination that surpasses the individual's strength is a modern feature; but Shakespeare makes it proceed from external causes, not internal motives, and so converts it into a kind of constraint. Ancient heroes aimed at possible ends, so that inclination, constraint, achievement were happily balanced; but with the ancients constraint excluded the sense of freedom. Shakespeare united old and new, and we should try and reconcile within our own minds that great and seemingly irreconcilable contrast. He came at the right time, when the voice of bigotry was silent, and he could develop religiously his pure inmost gifts apart from any one creed.

As a dramatic poet he wins the reader by laying bare the innermost secrets of life, to the disregard of the theatre's requirements. He excels as epitomizer, choosing a general idea as central point, and drawing the world and the universe at large within his circle. . . .

With A. W. Schlegel's insistence on the romantic note in Shakespeare fresh in our minds, it is startling to hear Goethe deny that he was a romantic: but instances are to be found on all sides of directly opposite sayings on Shakespeare by his critics. The first part of this essay is an interesting impressionistic account of the immediate effect on Goethe from reading Shakespeare; and he concludes, like Charles Lamb, that to reach the heart of a play it is better to read it in meditative quiet than see it on the stage. The second is criticism of that kind which is too abstract to stimulate directly the aesthetic sense, though it marks a fine distinction, and, coming from a world poet, helps us to realize Shakespeare's place among world poets.

## XI

THE prevailing impression of Shakespeare left by his first German critics, between 1767 and 1813, is of his width, freedom, universality, reality. He was nature's interpreter—and the unities were but irksome

bonds to him. To this opinion subscribe more or less in the same language Lessing, Goethe, Eschenburg, Herder, and the Schlegels. That his wider subject matter required deeper art is also recognized—and specially emphasized by Herder and the Schlegels. Nearly all admit his mastery of character and passion: typical parallel statements being Goethe's, that his characters are on a colossal scale—and Garve's, that he loved those grand and monstrous characters that express extreme passions. F. Schlegel speaks of the inimitable truth of his characterization; and A. W. Schlegel says that he had the perfection of dramatic characterization. Garve calls him the greatest and most philosophical poet that ever lived; and F. Schlegel pays tribute to his copious poetic philosophy. Both the Schlegels describe him as 'romantic'—which Goethe denies. A. W. Schlegel considers that his whole work was formed according to a leading idea; and Goethe mentions that he chooses a general idea as central point: and this was to bear fruit with future German critics. Goethe's saying that he was religious-minded but affected no particular creed is still the best of its kind.

The final impression from the collected German critics differs from the English and French. It is less literary and more philosophic; it hints at a science of human nature. It uses art and characterization as the servants of abstract knowledge.

## Chapter VII

### ENGLAND 1811-1818

I. COLERIDGE. II. LAMB. III. HAZLITT. IV. CONCLUSION.

THE name of Coleridge is always one to conjure with, but, except in his finest poems, he never worked a greater miracle than in these studies of Shakespeare.<sup>1</sup> Fragmentary as are all his writings, they yet remain the topmost stone of a monument which many great writers of the last 300 years have helped to build.

He begins by defining poetry—and, first of all, says what it is not. Invention and harmonious versification do not suffice to make a poet. 'It is an art of representing, in words, external nature and human thoughts and affections, by the production of as much immediate pleasure in parts, as is compatible with the largest sum of pleasure in the whole.' The poet must not dare to tread out of the magic circle of pleasure. Shakespeare has been dead 200 years, but is only now receiving the first-fruits of his glory. On the Continent he is honoured in a double way—by the admiration of the Germans and the contempt of the French. The French object that he has not observed the unities; they maintain that he is now and then tasteful and touching, but generally incorrect—a mere child of nature. On the contrary, Shakespeare's judgement is the most wonderful of his powers. Tried by the laws of Aristotle, which Sophocles followed, *Lear* may be outrageously irregular; but it must be remembered that the unities grew mainly out of the size and construction of the ancient theatres. The plays had to include within a short space events which in reality would have exceeded it: in other words, they were ideal—like our own. Pain and pleasure as they are could be better witnessed in hospitals and ball-rooms. What we require is the representation or imitation, not the thing itself. Our true pleasure from drama is that it is unreal.

Shakespeare's age was one of great abilities applied to individual and prudential purposes, not of high moral feeling and lofty principle. That he took the materials presented to him and achieved the grand result attempted by others in more favourable ages is proof of the purity and holiness of genius. As Spenser is out of space yet we feel in our consciousness that his country is natural and proper, so Shakespeare is out of time yet we know that his characters existed. He painted his personages by the simple force of meditation; he imitated certain parts of his own character or exaggerated such as existed in possibility; and they were true to nature and fragments of the divine mind that drew them.

<sup>1</sup> *Lectures and Notes on Sh.*, 1811.

They may appear different to different people, but are still nature and Shakespeare, and the creatures of his meditation. Shakespeare did not lack observation; but while observation may produce an accurate copy and even add something, it can only be in parts and fragments. Meditation extracts from every character what is generally true.

Shakespeare's characters may be reduced to a few classes: Biron is seen again in Mercutio, Benedict, and others. They combine the courtier's politeness with high intellect. The wonder is that Shakespeare can thus disguise himself and convey his meaning without betraying the poet. Mercutio's speech on Queen Mab has such facility and felicity that it would seem impossible to be thought otherwise. Thus does Shakespeare combine the poet and gentleman, and borrows from his amiable nature only that which can combine them—perfect simplicity of mind, and delight in what is excellent for its own sake, without reference to himself as causing it.

It is necessary to say something of the language in which he wrote. English excels all other languages in the number of practical words. Its peculiar advantage is that it is made out of many words which originally had the same meaning, but have gradually assumed different shades of meaning. Its monosyllabic character enables it to express more meaning in shorter compass than any other language. It has not been deliberately formed, but is the harvest of the unconscious wisdom of various nations. Shakespeare has been blamed for his conceits, and although many are not to be justified, it must be remembered that a vast number have been unfairly imputed to him: for there is no doubt that many portions of scenes attributed to Shakespeare were never written by him. However, a conceit is not necessarily unnatural, when we consider the fashion of Shakespeare's age. There are puns in Shakespeare that appear like the first openings of the mouth of nature—where nothing else could so properly be said. We may extend this to the rest of Shakespeare's works, where not only the words of his characters might have been said, but nothing so proper could have been said.

Shakespeare's wit is blended with the other qualities of his works; it appears in his tragedies, comedies, and histories, and is produced by combination of images, not only of words, like Voltaire's. The distinction between wit and fancy is that when the pleasure is produced not by surprise but by an image which remains with us and pleases for its own sake, then it is fancy. What passes for wit in Shakespeare is exquisite humour, heightened by a figure, and attributed to a particular character—such as the flea on Bardolph's nose, which Falstaff compares to a soul suffering in Purgatory.

To refute the charges of indecency and immorality against Shakespeare one must distinguish between manners and morals; and he will then appear an absolutely pure writer. Some offences against decency

and manners were the ordinary language of the time; and if Shakespeare offended it was always for the sake of merriment. His grossness is the mere sport of fancy, dissipating low feelings by exciting the intellect, and only injuring while it offends: whereas modern dramas injure because they do not offend. His worst passages are grossnesses against the degradations of our nature: those of modern plays are often delicacies in favour of them.

*R. and J.* contains specimens in degree of all the excellences which Shakespeare afterwards displayed in his more perfect dramas, only the parts are less happily combined. The judgement and taste, only to be attained by the discipline of experience, are not present enough to produce a work in which each part delights for itself, and the parts make up a whole that communicates the highest intellectual pleasure and satisfaction. There are two classes of character in *R. and J.*: in one the passion of love is truly and beautifully drawn, but the persons are not fully individualized. We get the description and development of love, but not its philosophical history. Tybalt is a commonplace person—yet no character in Shakespeare is the mere portrait of an individual. The individual satisfies as such, yet is a sort of class character—and this makes Shakespeare the poet of all ages. In Capulet we see the manner in which anger seizes hold of everything that comes in its way to express itself. No passion so predominates but that it includes all the parts of the character, and the reader never has a mere abstract of a passion, as of wrath or ambition, but the whole man is presented to him—the one predominating passion acting as the leader of the band to the rest. Shakespeare, by his psychological genius, develops the minutiae of the human heart, and while showing the thing he seems intent upon also makes visible what we should not have seen. Mercutio is a truly Shakespearian character, drawn rather from meditation than observation—or from observation, the child of meditation. It is easy to note down what one sees and hears in the world; but this differs from the observation of a mind which has formed a theory and system upon its own nature, remarks all that exemplify its truth, confirm it in that truth, and enable it to convey the truths of philosophy derived from the outward watchings of life.

Thus Shakespeare's favourite characters are full of lively intellect. Mercutio is a poet and also a gentleman; his death causes the catastrophe—and this makes it important. Had Mercutio not been amiable and interesting we would not have felt so strongly the necessity for Romeo's interference. Such a character of admirable generalization as the Nurse was not drawn from mere observation. No quality or peculiarity of a nurse is omitted. You have the garrulity of old age, and also its fondness, the arrogance of ignorance, the pride of meanness at being connected with a great family, grossness, and its attendant little low vices. Like all uncultivated persons, in her recollections, she

assists herself by the remembrance of visual circumstances. The poet of *R. and J.* is not entirely blended with the dramatist—as afterwards in the great tragedies.

It remains to speak of the hero and heroine, and Shakespeare's treatment of love. Love is a desire of the whole being to be united to some thing or being that will complete it. Every noble mind feels itself imperfect as a moral being. Providence has contrived wonderfully to make what is necessary to us a step in our exaltation to a higher and nobler state. Men and women possess different qualities; and the union of both is the most complete ideal of human character. Blending of like and unlike is the secret of all pure delight. Passion blended with order makes poetry perfect—and this is true of morals and the attachment of the sexes. Love is the friend of chastity, and leads us not to sink the mind in the body, but to draw the body up to the mind. It is not a selfish appetite, but an associative quality: its first effect is to associate the feeling with every object in nature. To develop the whole passion Shakespeare begins with the sense of imperfection—the yearning to unite with something lovely. Romeo was enamoured with the idea in his own mind, and appears to be in love with Rosaline, while really in love with his own idea.

The character of the Friar leads us to consider Shakespeare's treatment of priests. Unlike Beaumont and Fletcher Shakespeare always makes them win our love and respect. He took no copies from the worst parts of our nature, but drew his priests, like the rest of his characters, truly from the general body. In the same way he never depicted the passion of avarice, because it belongs only to parts of our nature and particular states of society, and is not permanent. His characters are natural, and therefore permanent, and independent of accidental circumstances. All his plays are built on the best and surest foundation; the characters are permanent because they stand on what is absolutely necessary to our existence. The greatest of the ancients are not his equals here: Oedipus is ruined for a crime of which he was not morally guilty. Cassius is the only character in Shakespeare to express envy; yet even here the vice is not hateful, because constitutional, derived from his parents rather than acquired by himself. Because circumstance and not the will is to blame, it is not a passion that debases the mind.

Poetry, like religion, seeks to generalize our notions, to place them in certain awful relations and so merge the individual man in the whole species. Both aid our imagination and subserve the interest of our virtues by removing to a distance the object of deepest interest. The aim of both is to perfect our nature and point out to us that it may be indefinitely improved. A being capable of understanding is mad if he remains fixed in the ground on which he treads; if, gifted with the divine faculties of indefinite hope and fear, he settles his faith upon that



which excludes them. An undevout poet is indeed impossible. The true poet never ceases to contemplate all things with the freshness and wonder of a child. We now ask if our moral nature is a part of the end of Providence, if we are or not beings meant for society? Without marriage and exclusive attachment there can be no human society. There might be herds, but no true society—no delightful intercourse between father and child, no sacred affections or charities, nothing to raise us above the brutes. There is thus something within us which answers the moral end. Because we are composed of body and mind the body may interpret the emotions of the mind—but the emotion itself is mental and moral. Two great truths emerge: in ourselves we are imperfect; and it is possible to unite two separate beings so that they retain their own qualities and acquire those of the other. Through all his plays Shakespeare looks thus at love, conceiving it with moral grandeur and philosophic penetration. Man seeks to perfect himself and complete the moral nature of another. Thus Romeo is in love before he has seen Juliet. Shakespeare would not have attempted to interest his audience by representing him as a weathercock blown round by every woman's breath. Like all men of genius Romeo was humble and conscious of imperfection. He yearned after an object that would perfect him, mistook it in Rosaline, but in Juliet found a being who resembled his ideal.

Shakespeare's characters are ideal realities; they are not the things themselves, but the abstracts of the things which a great mind takes into itself. In some the ideal is more prominent and put forward more intensely; in others we are deluded into thinking them real: though in truth both kinds are equally ideal. The difference is in the different powers of the mind employed by the poet.

The *Tempest* specially appeals to the imagination—a faculty that has no relation to time and place. In the first scene highest and lowest are combined most happily and most characteristically of Shakespeare's genius. Shakespeare is a vital writer, who transports himself into the being of each person, and brings before us the men themselves. The conversation between the Boatswain and Gonzalo shows us the true sailor with his contempt of danger, and the old counsellor with his high feeling, who does not condescend to notice the words addressed to him, but turns off to meditate with himself. The line Miranda speaks about the vessel—'Who had, no doubt, some noble creatures in her'—could only have been spoken by one who had been bred up in the island with but her father and a monster. Shakespeare never fails to insert a touch characteristic of the particular person and the circumstances.

Shakespeare's picturesque power is only equalled by Milton and Dante. The power of poetry is to instil that energy into the mind which compels the imagination to produce the picture. Shakespeare acted on laws within his own nature, not without law, and the proof

is the character of Ariel. Ariel is not angel, gnome, or fiend; he has reason, but (negatively) no mortal character. He lives and acts in air, and obtains his colours and properties from the rainbow and the skies. All that belongs to him belongs to the mind's delight in lovely external appearances. He is discontented to be bound to Prospero, yet he does feel grateful that Prospero liberated him; but having acknowledged gratitude, he reassumes the airy being in whom no trace is left of a feeling when once that feeling has passed from it. Shakespeare, with admirable judgement, uses Ariel's reluctance to serve Prospero to give him an interest in the event. Caliban partakes of a brute's qualities, yet has more understanding without moral reason, and has not the instincts which pertain to absolute animals. In some ways a noble being, he is far above contempt, and a man in the sense of the imagination.

In every scene we find the same judgement, preparing, inviting, and still gratifying, like a finished piece of music. To omit the conspiracy of Antonio and Sebastian would deprive the play of a charm which nothing could supply. Miranda possesses all the ideal beauties that the greatest poet of any age or country could imagine: but it is less intended here to point out Shakespeare's high poetic powers than his exquisite judgement. He is also prophet rather than poet, because to profound thought he adds intuitive knowledge of what man must be at all times and under all circumstances. Yet he is unconscious of himself: the half-god is disguised in the simplicity of a child.

Between *Richard II* and *Richard III* there is intimate connexion, because in both we see men in whom ambition is the ruling impulse. Richard III uses ambition as the means of pride of intellect; Bolingbroke uses his talents to gratify his ambition. Carefully examined, these characters which seem alike are totally distinct. Richard II is not without courage and powers of mind, but he is weak and variable, and his feelings are more those of a woman than a man. He undergoes the most rapid transitions of mind, accompanied with the utmost richness and copiousness of thought. No part, except that of Lear, would delight us more, were an actor capable of representing it. Where Bolingbroke differs from Richard III is that in the outset he has been sorely injured.

We now turn to Hamlet, and first of all we ask what did Shakespeare—who did nothing without design—mean when he drew the character and produced the tragedy? In Hamlet he intended a person to whom the external world was unreal, and objects of interest only when reflected in the mirror of his mind. He is placed in the most stimulating circumstances, but instead of acting he reasons and hesitates and reproaches himself—not from cowardice, but from the aversion to action of those who have a world in themselves. It is due to Shakespeare's judgement that the Ghost is first seen by others. Hamlet has not brooded long on the subject, and, immediately before

it appears, he is talking of other things. Thus the vision has the effect of abruptness, and the reader never thinks it the creation of a highly wrought imagination. Hamlet is not undecided as to his sense of duty, but knows what he should do and tries to make up his mind to do it. The reasons he gives for sparing the King at prayer are merely a pretext for not acting; they have not the atrocious meaning ascribed to them by Dr. Johnson. It is also part of the infirmity of his disposition that he gives himself up to his destiny and lets himself be sent to England. Shakespeare wished to impress upon us that action is the chief end of existence, that the most brilliant faculties of intellect are not valuable if they withdraw us from action. Hamlet has every excellence but the power to act; he lives in meditation and does nothing but resolve.

Coleridge opens his later treatise (1818) also with the remark that the object of poetry is to give pleasure. To the natural language of prose the poet must add a certain excitement which he feels in the act of composition. It produces a more vivid reflection of the truths of nature and the human heart. Milton said truly that poetry must be 'simple, sensuous, passionate'. The first precludes affectation and morbid peculiarity, the second ensures an objective framework, the third makes thought and imagery not simply objective, but warm and human.

Plato makes Socrates observe (*Symposium*) that it was the business of the same genius to excel in tragic and comic poetry, because opposites illustrate each other's nature: which proves that he had grasped the innermost essentials of the drama, abstracted from the forms of age or country. The need both to instruct and gratify the people produced the distinction between the Greek and English theatres, and was the origin of tragi-comedy: a larger field of moral instruction and ampler exhibition of the recesses of the human heart than we find in Aeschylus, Sophocles, or Euripides. Unlike other religions Christianity never wholly separates itself from morality.

The tragedies of Sophocles and comedies of Aristophanes are tragedies and comedies in the strict sense of the word. The plays of Shakespeare, in the ancient sense, are neither tragedies nor comedies, nor both in one. They are romantic dramas, or dramatic romances. The ancient dramas required the unities, because the fable, language, and characters appealed to the reason—though a reason which had to accommodate itself to the senses and so became a more elevated understanding. Shakespeare's romantic poetry appealed to the imagination—to the reason as contemplating our inward nature, and the inmost working of the passions. Such reason is independent of time and space; its certainties are eternal truths. If the poet can make us realize a scene imaginatively, he can use time and space as they exist in imagination. The Greek dramatists sternly separated the diverse in kind and disparate in degree. Shakespeare interlaces one with the other by a rainbow-like transfusion of hues.

The stage combines several or all the fine arts in a harmonious whole in order to imitate reality and produce temporary half-faith in the spectator. Children are often deceived by stage scenery, but never by pictures. The true stage-illusion is not in the mind's judging a certain scene to be a forest, but in its remitting the judgement that it is not a forest. We are never absolutely deluded, and it is a gross fault to attempt to cause the highest delusion.

Shakespeare had deep feeling and exquisite sense of beauty, and his feelings were under the command of his will. Higher still, he had imagination, or the power by which one image or feeling modifies others, and fuses many into one. The deep anguish of Lear as a father spreads the feeling of ingratitude and cruelty over the very elements of heaven. It combines many circumstances into one moment of consciousness, and produces an ultimate unity—the reduction of the spirit to its principle and fountain.

Shakespeare's poems show that he possessed the true poetic power of making everything present to the imagination. But his proper province was the drama, and we must reject the popular notion that he was a great dramatist by mere instinct. He was no inspired idiot, nor was his genius irregular and extravagant. His judgement equalled his genius, and the form of his works is as admirable as the matter. We must consider whether the differences in Shakespeare are proofs of poetic wisdom, results and symbols of living power and originality contrasted with lifeless mechanism and servile imitation. Not that genius is above rules, for it must embody to reveal itself—and a body is an organization. The power of genius is to act creatively under its own laws; and yet whole nations have denounced Shakespeare as a monster. The mistake is to confound mechanical regularity with organic form. Nature's forms are inexhaustible; and each exterior is the physiognomy of the being within. God does not choose idiots by whom to convey divine truths to man.

The law of unity which Shakespeare observes in all his plays is unity of feeling. In *R. and J.* all is youth and spring: even the old men, the Capulets and Montagues have eagerness, heartiness, vehemence—the effect of spring. Also the following characteristics distinguish his plays from those of all other dramatists: (1) Expectation rather than surprise. (2) Opposites attract and temper each other: thus Polonius is the personified memory of wisdom no longer actually possessed. He is no buffoon, but his character has become indurated from long habits of business. His advice to Laertes and Ophelia's reverence for his memory rather show him a statesman past his faculties: his recollections are wise, but what takes place before him escapes him. (3) Shakespeare has no innocent adulteries, no interesting incests, no virtuous vice. His fathers are roused by ingratitude, his husbands stung by unfaithfulness: in him the affections are wounded in those points in which all

feel. His morality compares favourably with that of any author of his day or ours. (4) The dramatic interest is independent of the plot. The plot interests because of the characters: hence the same stratagem may be justly applied to Benedict and Beatrice. A less absurd watchman than Dogberry could have acted his part. The mainspring of the plot of *M. Ado* is Don John: but he is merely shown to be withdrawn. (5) Independence of interest on story as groundwork of plot. Shakespeare never invented stories, but selected those that suited his purpose. He makes us acquainted with the man himself—Lear, Shylock, Richard. (6) There is interfusion of the lyrical in and through the dramatic. Not only are songs introduced, but the whole of *M.N.D.* is one continual specimen of the dramatized lyrical. (7) The characters must be inferred by the reader and are not told him. You must not take only what the friends and enemies of a character say: and even he sees himself through the medium of his character and not exactly as he is. Take all together, including a shrewd hint from the clown or fool. Lastly, Shakespeare, like nature, unites the heterogeneous. Passion, in his view, distinguishes an individual from others, but does not make a different kind of him. He saw passions and faiths grounded in our common nature, not in the accidents of ignorance or disease.

The events of Shakespeare's historical plays are immaterial, except as they clothe the inworking spirit. The resulting higher unity connects the events by reference to the workers, explains them in the motives, and presents men in their causative character. The facts therefore live, and become the framework of an animated whole. *Richard II* is Shakespeare's most purely historical play: for *Henry VI* is a kind of mixed drama. In the true historical play the history forms the plot; in the mixed, it directs it, in plays that contain history, like *Macbeth*, *Hamlet*, *Cymbeline*, *Lear*, the history subserves the plot. *Richard II* fulfils the great object of the historic drama—that of exciting patriotism. Richard does love his country, but in a feminine manner, and the result of his overflow of emotion, which he cannot control, is waste of energy, which should have been reserved for action, in resolves and menaces. The result is moral exhaustion, and alternations of unmanly despair and ungrounded hope in response to external accident. Bolingbroke's character is a preparation for *Henry IV*. The play is a noble and impressive one, and develops the idea of the only true loyalty. The object of the body politic is to humanize the animal man. But the problem is made complex by the thought that man is destined to be guided by higher principles than can be fulfilled in this state of existence.

*Richard III* should be contrasted with *Richard II*. Pride of intellect is the characteristic of Richard III; and Shakespeare develops in a tone of sublime morality the consequences of subordinating the moral to the intellectual.

There are two extremes of critical decision. The French presuppose that the aim of a drama is perfect delusion. Dr. Johnson supposes the auditors to be fully aware of the contrary. But there is an intermediate state, like a dream—a negative reality. The *Tempest* is a purely romantic drama, a birth of the imagination, outside time or space, where errors of chronology and geography count for nothing. It therefore appeals only to the imagination, not to the external senses of seeing and hearing. Observe, in the second scene, how anything that might have offended in Prospero the magician is reconciled in the natural feelings of a father. Miranda's first speech lays open her simplicity and tenderness. All the elements of womanhood are holy to Shakespeare: there is the feeling of all that *continuates* society—a sense of ancestry—purity resting on equipoise of the faculties, where the feelings represent all past experience of the race. Pope condemned Shakespeare's women for want of prominence; but Shakespeare knew this arose from the more exquisite harmony of all parts of the moral being. With him the distinct individuality and variety of women are merely the result of the modification of circumstances. Caliban, like some brute animals, has intellect without moral sense, and, as a result, is vicious. Man is truly human in the primacy of the moral being: in his intellectual powers the brutes approach him. Ferdinand and Miranda love at first sight: because in all cases of real love it is at one moment that it takes place. In this play also we see Shakespeare's treatment of the kind of politics which are inwoven with human nature. He is above party, and always the philosopher and moralist, with profound veneration for the established institutions of society. He makes sport good-naturedly with the passions and follies of a mob.

The satire of *L. L. L.* is chiefly on the follies of words. It is like a portrait taken of Shakespeare in boyhood which discovers many of his characteristic features. The resolve in the first act is whimsical, but not foreign to the spirit of the Middle Ages. From the diction and allusions we gather that, if Shakespeare had not had a learned education, his habits had at least been those of a student: for a young author's first work reveals his recent pursuits. The *Errors* is a farce, not a comedy; and farce not only allows but requires licence. Comedy would not allow the two Antipholuses—but farce even justifies the two Dromios.

*M. for M.*, which is Shakespeare's throughout, is his only painful genuine work. The comic part is disgusting, the tragic horrible. Angelo's marriage degrades the character of woman. *T. and C.* is the hardest of the plays to characterize. Shakespeare never fails to add some permanent interest to tradition, and either moralize or intellectualize his subject: so here, in *Cressida*, he shows a true passion fastening on an object by temporary preference. He contrasts this with the true passion of *Troilus* which is based on will, so that when

she sinks into infamy his moral energy snatches him aloof from all neighbourhood with her dishonour. But the Greek chieftains occupy the foreground—and what absorbs Shakespeare is the subservience of strength and animal courage to intellect and policy. But perhaps his ruling impulse was to translate the Homeric heroes into those of the romantic drama. *Coriolanus* illustrates the wonderfully philosophic impartiality of Shakespeare's politics, and we see his good-natured laugh at mobs—as also in *J.C.* In the latter play it sounds strange for Brutus to say that he found no personal cause in Caesar's past conduct as a man. Had not Caesar entered Rome as a conqueror and placed his Gauls in the Senate? It may be doubted whether the last two lines of Antony's speech are genuine:

O world! thou wast the forest to this hart,  
And this, indeed, O world! the heart of thee.

The rhythm is not Shakespearian, but the tune of an old play from which the actor might have interpolated them. They interrupt the sense and connexion, and the flow of the passion and the Shakespearian link of association. More than anything in Shakespeare the quarrel between Brutus and Cassius impresses the belief that his genius was superhuman. *A. and C.*, with its happy valiancy of style, is a formidable rival to the great tragedies. It is the love of passion and appetite contrasted with that of affection and instinct in *R. and J.* The art in *Cleopatra* is profound; the depth and energy of her passion make it less criminal, though it does spring from licentious craving, and is less spontaneous than purposely stimulated. It is the most wonderful of Shakespeare's historic plays, because he follows history minutely, yet impresses with angelic strength.

Of the three unities, those of time and place were mere inconveniences attached to the local peculiarities of the Athenian drama; that of action alone was a principle, and Shakespeare excelled in preserving it. Perhaps for unity of action we should substitute totality of interest, because it involves the distinction between mechanical skill and creative power. Thence arises the harmony of the wildest natural landscape; and this single energy which modifies each component part is Shakespeare's particular excellence, and especially appears in *R. and J.* The play is grounded in family life, and Shakespeare first places before us a picture of all its impulses. In the quarrels of the servants who imitate their masters there is a sort of unhired fidelity which pleases. Romeo's previous love is a strong instance of Shakespeare's fine insight into the passions: it would have displeased us had Juliet been represented as already in love. The Nurse is nearest to direct borrowing from observation of anything in Shakespeare: because in infancy and childhood the individual in nature represents a class. We may compare Mercutio in his overflowing life

to a wanton beauty distorting her face before her enraptured lover. He laughs away the cares of others, and is yet interested in them.

*Lear* is Shakespeare's only serious play founded on improbability—but, with matchless judgement, he selected an old popular story, taken for granted, and therefore without the effects of improbability. It is also merely the canvas for the characters and passions. The accidental is nowhere the groundwork of the passions, but that which in all ages has been close to the heart of man. Thus, if we substitute for the pound of flesh in the *Merchant* any other danger, the situations and emotions will remain equally excellent: but take away from the *Mad Lover* of Beaumont and Fletcher its fantastic hypothesis, and the main scenes will go with it.

Edmund has a powerful intellect and strong energetic will, but he hears the circumstances of his birth spoken of, by his own father, with a most degrading and licentious liberty. He is conscious that he is only treated with respect by an effort of courtesy, and the result is a corrosive *virus* which envenoms pride, and causes envy, hatred, and lust for power with its blaze of radiance to hide the dark spots on his disk. He feels his pangs of shame as wrongs because they are personally undeserved, and with a blind ferment of vindictive working towards a brother whose stainless birth was a constant remembrancer of his own debasement. The stain of bastardy aggravated heavily the mournful alienation of brotherly love occasioned by the law of primogeniture in noble families. Shakespeare was too heedful to let guilt pass into monstrosity, which would happen were there no temptations to wickedness; so he represents Edmund as having been nine years absent from home, and educated abroad, to prevent kindly counteractions to feelings of shame which might have been derived from living with his brother and their common father. Kent is nearest in Shakespeare's characters to perfect goodness, yet the most individualized. His bluntness is a nobleman's contempt for overstrained courtesy. Oswald is in exact antithesis—Shakespeare's only character of utter irredeemable baseness. In *Lear* old age is itself a character, and it was needless to individualize him further: the relations to him of others—fidelity and ingratitude—distinguish him. The wild babbling and inspired idiocy of the Fool articulate and gauge the horrors of the scene. Goneril and Regan appear as little as possible, but whenever they are introduced pure horror reigns. Edgar's assumed madness displays the profound difference of *Lear*'s real madness. In Edgar's you see a fixed purpose: in *Lear*'s the brooding of the one anguish, an eddy without progression. *Lear*'s faults increase our pity for him; they convince us as means of his sufferings and aggravations of his daughters' ingratitude. We see all external nature in a storm, and all moral nature convulsed. Uttered to the blind, the howlings of nature would seem converted into the voice of conscious humanity.



*Hamlet* is not inexplicable, but related to the fundamental laws of our nature, as its world-wide popularity proves. Man differs from the brute in so far as thought prevails over sense, but if he meditates to excess he may lose power to act. One of Shakespeare's modes of creating character is to conceive a faculty in excess, and place himself, thus mutilated or diseased, under given circumstances. In *Hamlet* the balance between the real and imaginary world is disturbed; his thoughts and images of his fancy are more vivid than his perceptions, and even the latter pass through the *medium* of his contemplations and acquire alien form and colour. Hence enormous intellectual activity and hatred of action: and circumstances require immediate action. Thought is indefinite, and only external imagery is definite; therefore the sense of sublimity arises not from the sight of an object, but from the beholder's reflection upon it. The opening ghost scene, with its admirable indefiniteness and attention to minute sounds and objects, both hides the poet and approximates the reader to that state in which the highest poetry will appear. On the brink of great events men often elude the pressure of their own thoughts: Act II, Sc. iv, opens with unimportant talk, and the Ghost takes the speakers by surprise. No modern writer would have dared to precede this last visitation by two distinct appearances, or could make the third the most solemn and impressive. *Hamlet* is stimulated to speak because of human auditors; and the Ghost's previous appearances have brought it nearer to this world. Wonderful indeed is this gain of objectivity by a ghost that yet retains all its ghostly attributes and fearful subjectivity. *Hamlet's* soliloquy, 'To be or not to be', is of absolutely universal interest, yet could have been given to no one but *Hamlet*. He sees that Ophelia is a decoy and speaks less to her than at listeners and spies. The final, 'All may be well!' of the King's soliloquy shows the soul flattering itself on its own struggle, though baffled. The solution is in the divine *medium* of the Christian doctrine of expiation: not what you have done, but what you are must determine. It is the only play where accident forms an essential part of the plot: the pirates. As such it is in keeping with the character of *Hamlet* who is ever at last determined by accident or passion.

*Macbeth* is the most rapid of the plays, and contains no puns or comedy except in the Porter scene, which is an undoubted interpolation. There is no sophistry of self-delusion, except when before the murder *Macbeth* mistranslates the recoilings and ominous whispers of conscience into prudential and selfish reasonings—and, after it, the terrors of remorse into fear from external dangers. Otherwise his language is the grave utterance of the very heart, conscience-sick, even to the last faintings of moral death. Variety arises from rage, caused ever and anon by disruption of anxious thought, and quick transition of fear into it. In *Hamlet* the superstitious opening is connected with the best and holiest feelings: here, with the shadowy, turbulent, and

unsanctified cravings of the individual will. Victorious generals are naturally superstitious, because there is much of chance in war. Hope meeting with an active and combining intellect, and imagination vivid enough to disquiet and impel the soul to try to realize its images, increases the mind's creative power; and the images satisfy by themselves, as with a poet. But gratified hope becomes fear when the elementary basis of the passion remains. The character of the witches consists in the imaginative disconnected from the good. They are the shadowy obscure and fearfully anomalous of physical nature—elemental avengers without sex or kin. Truly Shakespearian is Macbeth's character reflected in Banquo's unpossessed mind, like a clear mirror. It is Banquo who notices the effect on Macbeth's mind, made temptable by previous dallying with ambitious thoughts. He knows not that to will a temporal end for itself is to will the means: hence the danger of indulging fancies. Lady Macbeth is a class individualized: of high rank, solitary, and feeding herself with day-dreams of ambition, she mistakes the courage of fantasy for power to bear the consequences of the realities of guilt. The Porter's low soliloquy must be an interpolation. Macbeth ever mistakes the anguish of conscience for fears of selfishness, and plunges still deeper in guilt and ruin. The scene in Macduff's castle, though dreadful, is a relief, because it is a variety, being domestic, and therefore soothing, as associated with life's only real pleasures. We see all in Shakespeare like images in a calm lake, most distinct, most accurate, but more splendid and glorified. But we must have the receptiveness of moral impression, without which the purposes and ends of the drama would be frustrated.

The jealousy of Leontes (*W. Tale*) is a vice of the mind, a culpable tendency of the temper, far other than Othello's. There is a grossness of conception, and shame of his own feelings, yet he is forced by passion to utter it. Iago fears contempt, like all do who habitually express contempt for others. A wicked man will employ real feelings, as well as assume alien ones, to effect his purpose. He despises all but intellectual power; he is passionless, and all his will is in intellect. His soliloquy is truly awful: the motive-hunting of motiveless malignity, and he is a being next to devil. All the sarcasms on women in Shakespeare are uttered by villains. Othello is a Moor, black but no negro; and it is a common error to take as literally true the epithets applied by the characters to each other. He does not kill Desdemona from jealousy, but in a conviction forced on him by Iago's superhuman art. Othello only lived in Desdemona, and when he thought her a fallen angel his heart was divided by civil war. As the curtain drops, which do we pity most?

Shakespeare formed his characters not out of his own individual nature, but out of the universal nature within, which is potentially in

each particular, and was opened out to him as his prerogative: the *homo generalis* which is not an abstraction from observation of many men, but a substance that may be endlessly modified. It is a common vice of dramatic writers to draw out of themselves. Beaumont and Fletcher give descriptions of characters by the poet, not the characters themselves. A play of Massinger's produces no one single effect—like *A.Y.L.* does from the spirit of the whole—or *Hamlet*, because one character is indisputably prominent. Massinger's comic scenes do not harmonize with the tragic, but interrupt the feeling, and degrade the characters from tragic interest. Also he has no high imagination, and presents objects as they appear in nature: whereas Shakespeare, by metaphors and figures, involves, in the thing considered, a universe of past and possible experiences. *Volpone* is Ben Jonson's one play containing characters with whom you can morally sympathize; while only in *M. for M.* throughout Shakespeare are there characters whom you cannot follow with affection. Isabella is his least pleasing woman, and the play is his only genuine work which is painful. Ben Jonson's comic characters rise out of, or consist in, the accident—but Shakespeare's have exquisitely characteristic features. The contrast between the women of Beaumont and Fletcher and those of Shakespeare is frightful. There are few likeable characters in Beaumont and Fletcher, but Shakespeare makes one have a sort of sneaking affection even for his Barnardines. His Iagos and Richards are fearful rather than hateful, because of their profound intellects. Goneril and Regan, who are utter monsters, prove his superlative judgement and fine moral tact. They are mostly kept out of sight, and are means to excite and deepen noblest emotions towards Lear and Cordelia.

The poems remain to speak of; and, in *Venus*, besides the sweet versification, the promise of genius is the choice of subjects remote from the private interests and circumstances of the writer. A fine spirit places the whole before our view, but does not share in the passions. The dramatic interest was already working in Shakespeare, and he makes his Venus and Adonis seem at once the characters themselves and the whole representation of those characters by the most consummate actors. Never was poem less dangerous on a moral account—since Shakespeare precludes all sympathy for the animal impulse by dissipating the reader's notice among the thousand outward images. Also he has a predominant passion which reduces multitude to unity: for images faithfully copied from nature do not characterize the poet. There is, besides, depth and energy of thought—for a great poet must be a great philosopher, since poetry is the blossom and fragrantcy of all human knowledge, thoughts, passions, emotions, language. Only in the drama were Shakespeare's creative power and intellectual energy reconciled. *Venus* did not admit the deeper passions; but *Lucrece* demanded their intensest workings: yet it has neither

pathos nor any other dramatic quality, but the same minute and faithful imagery, a wider range of knowledge and reflection, and domination over the whole world of language.

Shakespeare was no passive vehicle of inspiration, but studied patiently, meditated deeply, understood minutely, till knowledge became habitual and intuitive, one with his feelings, and gave birth to his stupendous power. A contrast to Milton who attracts all into the unity of his own ideal, he becomes all things yet for ever remains himself. . . .

Where Coleridge differs from preceding critics and advances far beyond them is that he endeavours to recapture Shakespeare's experience. He is not only a critic, but a poet and philosopher, who from boyhood has meditated over his subject. He does not judge, but describes his impressions, and it is due to the universal quality of his mind that these interpret Shakespeare in a unique manner. That nothing may be lacking, his poetic gift serves him well: a happy image will at times help him to realize his own thought in a way that mere abstract statement would not have done. Thus he says that Edmund has 'a lust for that power which in its blaze of radiance would hide the dark spots on his disk'; or that 'Macbeth's language is the grave utterance of the very heart, conscience-sick, even to the last faintings of moral death'.

He looks upon Shakespeare as the greatest human being who has ever existed, and it seems to him that the gist of his teaching is that all contradictions may be reconciled in an ultimate reality. He pays full tribute to Shakespeare's artistic power—surpassing that of the ancients; he deals excellently with the problem of the unities; and he is not backward to recognize his unsurpassed verse: but he accentuates Shakespeare the philosopher. He considers him no irregular genius or passive vehicle of inspiration, but a clear and deep thinker, whose judgement equalled his genius. In reading Coleridge's criticism we must keep in mind the ultimate reality which is to be discovered, and his opinion that the power of poetry is not to supply definite images, but to instil that energy into the mind which compels the imagination to produce the picture.

A modern writer,<sup>1</sup> while admitting that Coleridge's aim to recapture the experience rather than find the idea, was a permanent advance in criticism, censures him for confusing intuition and reason. It was his error, she says, to believe that the poet's vision was knowledge of reality. In criticizing Shakespeare, the most universal of all poets, such a fault, by stimulating the critic's faith, would become a virtue. Thus he is at his best in interpreting Shakespeare's characters—especially Cassius, Romeo, Mercutio, Lear, and, above all, Ariel. Other critics have remarked that if such supernatural beings existed they would be

<sup>1</sup> *The Romantic Theory of Poetry*, by A. E. Powell (Arnold, 1926).

as Shakespeare represents them: but Coleridge proves it by explaining how Ariel reacts to human feeling. That the danger pointed out by Miss Powell exists we do not dispute; and Coleridge succumbs to it with Hamlet and triumphs over it with Macbeth. She remarks that the critic's duty is to interpret the form; that knowledge only supplements the artist's deficiencies in expression—the practical desire untransformed by intuition; that we need knowledge of the lives of Shelley and Byron to interpret their early poems, but not for *Prometheus* or *Beppo*. Thus modern criticism is finding other causes than excess of thought for Hamlet's delay; but, knowing the circumstances of Coleridge's life, we do not wonder that he concentrated upon that side of Hamlet's nature. In Carlyle's ever memorable chapter<sup>1</sup> we see him unable to make up his mind on which side of the path to walk. But whereas it is becoming the fashion to think of Macbeth as influenced only by worldly considerations, Coleridge affirms that he mistranslates the whispers of conscience into prudential reasoning; and his voice has the authentic ring, though we know that he himself suffered long from remorse.

At the present day it is of interest to note that he is aware that a great deal attributed to Shakespeare was not written by him, although he regards all but one sentence of the Porter scene in *Macbeth* as an interpolation—and, on the other hand, he praises Helena of *All's Well*, and accepts the whole of *M. for M.* Yet he rightly detects an un-Shakespearian rhythm in a certain passage of *Julius Caesar*.

The first and greatest of the romantic critics, he has transformed his subject. He is the moon of Shakespearian criticism, so far accompanied by only one satellite—Maurice Morgann. The greatest of the others—Dryden, Pope, Johnson—are but shooting-stars across the darkness. If we would condense his message it is this: that life is a mystery, that the greatest mystery of all is the human soul, and that Shakespeare has done more to make darkness visible than any being who has walked with us on this planet: and that he worked his miracle with his imagination—imagination which is an originating and not a decorative faculty.

Coleridge on Shakespeare resembles Jowett on Plato: it is said of both critics that they read more into their subjects than the text warrants. But this implies as much praise as blame, because the effect can be achieved only by using the inmost experience. Coleridge is always withdrawing us from the outer form to the inner reality of which it is a symbol. Through the screen of Macbeth's worldly considerations he sees the fires of conscience. The relations of others towards him make Lear individual. Goneril and Regan are means to excite noble emotions for Lear and Cordelia. These are facts of Coleridge's aesthetic-spiritual experience, and they therefore represent

<sup>1</sup> *Life of Sterling*.

absolute critical truth. The mystic, through prayer and meditation, feels his individual mind merging into a larger mind: this is a fact of the universe which the keenest logician will not now oppose. Coleridge has effected contact with the Shakespearian mind: the basis of his work is truth. It will endure and convince, no matter how many counter-truths are marshalled against it by later critics.

## II

CHARLES LAMB<sup>1</sup> argues that Shakespeare's plays are least fitted to be performed on the stage, because acting deals only with the superficial things of passion, whereas Shakespeare reveals the internal workings and movements of a great mind. The glory of the scenic art is to personate passion; but the actor cannot show wherein the same passion differs in low and vulgar natures. In Shakespeare the form of speaking is but an artificial medium to make reader or spectator know the inner structure and workings of mind in a character, which otherwise only intuition could have told him. Stage representation reduces everything to a controversy of elocution. Hamlet's acts are transactions between himself and his moral sense—solitary musings, silent meditations—no theme for the gesticulating actor. It is said that Garrick excelled in Hamlet's part: but what have his physical properties to do with intellect? The actor is more concerned with how the character looks and speaks than what he is and says. The spectator of *Othello*, for instance, may see an actor personating a passion of grief or anger—the symbol of the emotion which passes current at the theatre for it; but he knows nothing of the grounds of the passion, its correspondence to a great or heroic nature—the only worthy object of tragedy.

Shakespeare fetched his characters from his own mind, not from what is called observation of life. Of those images of virtue and knowledge we recognize a part and mistake it for the whole—as we mistake the powers which he creates in us for faculties of our own minds. His characters are objects of meditation rather than interest or curiosity as to their actions. We think less of the crimes which Macbeth, Richard, Iago commit than the ambition which prompts them to overleap moral fences. The inner mind in its perverted greatness seems real, the crime nothing. On the stage it is the act which is everything and the impulse nothing. To see Lear acted is to see an old man turned out of doors by his daughters in a rainy night. His greatness is intellectual and can no more be represented on the stage than the machinery to mimic the storm can express the horrors of the elements. The stage reveals only corporal infirmities and impotent rage; but when we read we are in Lear's mind and sustained by its grandeur. Desdemona sees Othello's colour in his mind; but every one who sees *Othello* acted sinks

<sup>1</sup> *On the Tragedies of Sh.*, 1811.

his mind in his colour. There is something revolting in the courtship and wedded caresses; and the actual sight overweighs the beautiful compromise which we make in reading. To read the witch scenes in *Macbeth* is to be spellbound, as Macbeth himself was: the witches on the stage become old women to be laughed at. Prospero appears a conjurer in place of an enchanter: for all spirits and fairies can only be believed, not painted.

The same arguments apply to the subject of scenery and dresses. Macbeth is presented in a modern coronation robe, but, in reading, we are merely conscious of the dimmest images of royalty—not the fashion of crown or sceptre. The reading of a tragedy is a fine abstraction. It presents to the fancy as much external appearance as to bring home to us flesh and blood, while our imagination works on the internal machinery of the character. . . .

Lamb's point of view is that of the romantic who exalts inner over outer. It has been said that he proves too much—and we might suggest that men on this planet consist of mind and body, that each may be used to express and develop the other, and that every thought of the mind has its counterpart in external nature. He forgets two important truths: that the business of art is to suggest, not affirm; and that the imagination of the spectator may be moved by the actor's skill to do its own working. We also note with surprise that one who was a poet, and therefore on the concrete side, should put in a plea for the abstract: that one who loved life as he did, and above all the life of the town—'the sweet security of streets' <sup>1</sup>—should profess scorn for actors and audiences. But it must be remembered that his nature was many-sided—that two of the most inspired essays of the town-lover and unmarried, childless man were *Mackery End, in Hertfordshire*, and *Dream-Children*. We must, therefore, conclude that his impressions from Shakespeare represent as equally real a phase as the might-have-beens of his actual life. It vindicates his saying that Shakespeare creates powers in us—and may be compared with Coleridge's definition of Shakespeare's imagination as a power that stimulates the reader's mind to create for itself. Here we see the link between Shakespeare and the romantics of the early nineteenth century. Lamb's withdrawal from the concrete is only partial; in his criticism of *Macbeth* occurs a typical phrase: 'Some dim images of royalty, a crown and sceptre, may float before our eyes.' It reveals the imagination of the romantic, home-sick for earlier ages, in the process of working. Equally typical is a kind of interplay between abstract and concrete, as when he discovers in Lear 'a mighty irregular power of reasoning, immethodized from the ordinary purposes of life'—or speaks of the 'beautiful compromise' of Desdemona's love for Othello—or Othello's mind 'marvellously laid open with all its strengths and weaknesses'.

<sup>1</sup> *Elia: New Year's Eve*.

We must not omit Lamb's words on the witches in *Macbeth*, when he compares them with those of Thomas Middleton.<sup>1</sup> The latter's Hecate has a son; but Shakespeare's witches have no children and seem to have no parents, no beginning or ending, no human passions or relations. To heighten their mystery they have no names.

### III

WILLIAM HAZLITT<sup>2</sup> is the third of the great critics who wrote of Shakespeare in the second decade of the nineteenth century. He remarks in his preface that Shakespeare's descriptions are identical with the things themselves, seen through the fine medium of passion. *Cymbeline* is a dramatic romance, the action of which is not concentrated—but the principle of perspective, introduced into the subject by imaginary changes of scene, besides the length of time, make the interest more aerial and refined. No link is ever broken, and the most straggling incident helps the catastrophe. The whole is overspread by a tender gloom. Posthumus interests because Imogen is interested in him, and Shakespeare's heroines exist only in their attachment to others. It is the perfect womanly character, the sense of weakness leaning on the strength of its affections for support, quite unlike stage-heroines or tragedy-queens. Imogen is the most tender and artless of Shakespeare's women, she relies not on her personal charms, but on the depth of her love, truth, and constancy. Cloten cuts a poor figure in love, but he can observe shrewdly. Of the other characters there is the utmost keeping in each; and the different parts of the play are harmonized like a picture. Shakespeare uses not only contrasts, but the principles of analogy to reconcile diversities of character and maintain continuity of feeling. As Imogen's fidelity is the ruling interest, so the picture is filled up with subordinate examples of the same feeling. Cloten is amorously importunate, Iachimo perseveres in his imposture, Pisanio is faithful to his mistress, Belarius obstinately conceals the fate of the princes, the Queen is incorrigibly wicked, and *Cymbeline* blindly uxorious. Different inflections of the same predominant feeling strengthen one another like musical chords. Shakespeare not only lets us into the minds of his characters, but gives tone and colour to scenes from the feelings of their supposed inhabitants.

He brings home to us what he represents as a part of our experience. *Macbeth* is like a record of a preternatural and tragic event: we see the workings of passion, the spells of magic, with absolute truth and vividness. The tragedy displays lofty imagination and tumultuous vehemence of action, and each is made the moving principle of the other. *Macbeth*'s energy springs from the anxiety and agitation of his mind. Lady

<sup>1</sup> *Characters of Dramatic Writers Contemporary with Sh.*, 1808, 1818.

<sup>2</sup> *Characters of Sh.'s Plays*, 1817.



Macbeth only sins to gain a great end, and her guilt may even be covered by her power of resolution, presence of mind, and self-will. Her solid, substantial flesh-and-blood display of passion contrasts with the cold, abstracted, servile malignity of the witches, who urge Macbeth to his fate from mere love of mischief. They are unreal, abortive, half-existences, who become sublime from their exemption from all human affairs—as Lady Macbeth does from force of passion. Duncan's character has a dramatic beauty which excites the respect and pity even of his murderers. Of all Shakespeare's plays *Macbeth* is done on the strongest principle of contrast. It moves on the verge of an abyss, and is a constant struggle between life and death. Fierce extremes meet, the warring of opposite natures. Transitions from triumph to despair, from terror to the repose of death, are sudden and startling. Every passion brings in its fellow-contrary—and the whole is a chaos of strange and forbidden things. There are violent antitheses of style: 'So fair and foul a day'—Macbeth will 'sleep in spite of thunder'. Lady Macbeth's speech, 'Had he not resembled my father', shows both murder and filial piety. Macbeth catches a wildness and imaginary grandeur from the superstitions of the age, the rude state of society, the local scenery and customs. The strange events amaze and terrify him, so that he stands in doubt between the worlds of reality and fancy.

*Julius Caesar* is the least good of the Roman plays, but has admirable and affecting passages, and shows profound knowledge of character—though to the last remark Caesar himself is an exception. It also shows that Shakespeare penetrated as deeply into political character as personal. The optimism of Brutus wrecks the cause: those who are sincere trust to the professions of others. Cassius was a better conspirator—and his irritability of temper added to his inveteracy of purpose, and sharpened his patriotism. His mixed motives fitted him to contend with bad men.

Tragedy is said to purify the affections by terror and pity: that is, to substitute imaginary sympathy for mere selfishness. It gives us an impersonal interest in humanity, and makes real the great and remote and possible. *Othello* excites our sympathy in an extraordinary degree: its moral is nearest of Shakespeare's plays to the concerns of human life. The picturesque contrasts of character are as remarkable as the depth of passion. The persons of the characters remain in the mind's eye even when we are not thinking of their actions or sentiments. Shakespeare, with wonderful knowledge, has embodied extreme creations, identified each character with itself, and blended different qualities together. The contrast of *Othello* and *Iago* is intensified by the highly finished traits of each character, and the skill with which Shakespeare has laboured the finer shades of difference. Throughout *Macbeth* the struggle is between opposite feelings; but in *Othello* different passions prevail in turn: love turns to jealousy and hatred.

In painting the struggle in *Othello*, in raising passion to its height from the smallest beginnings, Shakespeare unfolds the strength and weakness of our nature; and, in uniting sublimity of thought with anguish of keenest woe, shows the mastery of his genius and of his power over the human heart. With *Desdemona*, as with most of Shakespeare's women, we forget her beauty in her devotion to her husband. With wonderful truth she unites timidity and boldness; her pertinacity rises out of her gentleness; and her whole character consists in having no will of her own. In depicting *Iago* Shakespeare shows himself as good a philosopher as poet, because he knew that love of power, which is another name for love of mischief, is natural to man. *Iago* unites diseased intellectual activity and perfect moral indifference: he is almost as indifferent to his own fate as that of others. He is the dupe of his ruling passion—insatiable craving after action of the most difficult and dangerous kind—and he stabs men in the dark to prevent ennui. He turns *Desdemona's* character inside out—and only Shakespeare's genius could have preserved the entire interest and delicacy of the part, and even added elegance and dignity from her peculiar circumstances. *Iago's* licentious conversation is not from love of grossness, but desire to find out the worst side of everything; and his mind digests only poisons. His part would be intolerable but for its indefatigable industry and inexhaustible resources, which divert the attention of spectators from end to means.

*Timon* has as intense a feeling of his subject as any play of Shakespeare. One of the few where he is in earnest throughout, it has a corresponding unity. The only play where spleen predominates, it is as much satire as play. The churlish profession of misanthropy in *Apemantus* contrasts with the profound feeling of it in *Timon*. *Apemantus* conceals a lurking selfishness beneath his grossness and scorn. All *Timon's* imprecations show the extravagant workings of disappointed passion, of love altered to hate. He becomes as ideal in his passion for ill as he was before in his belief of good. *Apemantus* was satisfied with the mischief existing in the world, and his own ill nature. *Timon's* misanthropy is forced, uphill work, and he wishes to sink into the quiet of the grave.

In *Coriolanus*, which is a storehouse of political commonplaces, Shakespeare leans to the arbitrary side—perhaps because he despised his own origin. The cause of the people is hardly one for poetry, but admits of rhetoric. The language of poetry falls in with that of power; the principle of poetry is aristocratic and anti-levelling; and there is nothing heroic in a crowd of rogues not wishing to be starved. But when a single man comes forward to humiliate them from mere pride and self-will, we admire his prowess and despise their pusillanimity. Submission to authority does not flatter the imagination; but the assumption of a right to insult or oppress others carries an imposing

air of superiority with it. Love of power in ourselves and admiration of it in others are natural to man, and make him both tyrant and slave.<sup>1</sup> The interests of the great are opposed to those of the community: power exists at the expense of weakness, riches of poverty, pride of degradation. If the great had also superior knowledge (which they have not) they would be yet more formidable—devils rather than gods. The moral of the play is that those who have little shall have less—the poor should starve, the slaves be beaten. It is the logic of the imagination and the passions which seeks to aggrandize what excites admiration, and heap contempt on misery.

Shakespeare in *T. and C.* suggests a contrast with Chaucer, whose characters are either quite serious or comic. Shakespeare blends the ludicrous and ironical with the stately and impassioned. Chaucer became one with his characters; the conscious smile is not seen lurking under the brow of grief or impatience. Shakespeare never committed himself to his characters, and is free from prejudices either for or against them. Perhaps he is too volatile and heedless, exhibiting, besides inevitable impressions on the mind, the possible and fantastical also. His imagination threw a lustre over things: while everything in Chaucer has a downright reality. With the latter a simile or sentiment is given as if upon evidence; with Shakespeare the commonest matter of fact has a romantic grace, or seems to float with the breath of imagination in a freer element. However fine or profound was Chaucer's thought we know what is coming: whereas Shakespeare saw everything by intuition. Chaucer's ideas did not react upon one another, but Shakespeare's are excessively sociable.

*A. and C.* is a very noble play, but just below the first class. It is full of the pervading and comprehensive power by which Shakespeare always mastered time and circumstances. He does not reason about what his characters would do or say, but at once *becomes* them, and speaks and acts for them. Things are not inferred, but take place as they would in reality. Cleopatra is a masterpiece—and there is irregular grandeur in Antony's soul. Her death almost redeems her faults, and she learns from the depth of despair the strength of her affections.

Hamlet's speeches are as real as our thoughts: it is *we* who are Hamlet. The turn of his mind transfers his distresses to the general account of humanity. Of all the plays *Hamlet* has most ingenuity, originality, and unstudied development of character. The interest is never forced; events succeed each other as matters of course; and the characters think, speak, and act as they might do if left to themselves. Hamlet is no hero, but young and princely, full of high enthusiasm and quick sensibility—the sport of circumstances. He can only act on the spur of the occasion, but otherwise remains puzzled and finds pretence to relapse into indolence and thoughtfulness. Prince of

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Stapfer on Coriolanus.

philosophical speculators, he declines his revenge because he cannot have it perfect, according to his most refined idea. He is too absorbed in the airy world of contemplation to consider the practical consequences of things. His conduct to Ophelia is that of assumed severity only. No one but Shakespeare could have so drawn Ophelia; she is unapproached except in some of the old romantic ballads. Laertes is too hot and choleric; but Polonius is perfect of his kind—for it is not inconsistent to act foolishly and talk sensibly. Shakespeare observes the distinctions between men's understandings and moral habits. Polonius is no fool, but makes himself so; his folly is impropriety of intention.

Shakespeare is the most universal genius that ever lived; he sees equally into the world of imagination and reality: and over all presides the same truth of character and nature, and the same spirit of humanity. His ideal beings are as true as real, as consistent with themselves, and speak a special language. The *Tempest*, one of the most original and perfect plays, shows all the variety of his powers. Human and imaginary, dramatic and grotesque, are perfectly blended. The fantastic is palpable, and coheres with the rest; the real characters and events partake of the wildness of a dream. All the characters are connected parts of the story; and the local scenery is of a piece and character with the subject. The drunken and reeling sailors share in the tumult of the elements, and give a classical dignity to Caliban. The latter is one of Shakespeare's wildest and most abstracted characters. Redeemed by power and truth of imagination, he is gross but not vulgar, because his character grows out of the soil where it is rooted, and is uncramped by any of the meannesses of custom. Ariel is imaginary power, the swiftness of thought personified; he differs from Puck in having a fellow-feeling in the interests of those he is employed about. Justice has not been done to Bottom the Weaver: he understood the subject of dramatic illusion as well as any modern essayist. Puck is absolutely unlike Ariel; and no other poet could have made two such different characters out of the same fanciful materials and situations. Prospero and his world of spirits are a set of moralists: but with Oberon and his fairies we enter the empire of the butterflies. 'Human mortals' beautifully depicts the contrast between the men and women actors and the fairies.

There is nothing sickly and sentimental in the love of Romeo and Juliet: they are in love, but not love-sick. We get the very soul of pleasure, the healthy pulse of the passions. Shakespeare has given us a picture of life such as it is in the order of nature. He has founded their passion not on the pleasures they had experienced, but on those they had *not* experienced. Expectation of pleasure is inexhaustible till experience kills it. Only indifference can abate the transport of the first sweet sense of pleasure; only disappointment can check the ardour

of hope. The play shows transition from highest bliss to lowest despair. The only evil that the two lovers even apprehend is loss of the greatest possible happiness: and happiness does not spring from memories of the past, but ignorance of the future, which fills the void to come with the warmth of our desires. We know nothing of the world but what we wish it to be, and believe all that we wish. Experience brings us down to the world of reality. With Juliet the feelings of the heart sanctify, without disguising, the impulses of nature. She is neither forward nor coy, but a pure effusion of nature. Shakespeare has been blamed for mingling low characters in tragedy, but they produce a thousand beauties. Contrast Juliet's guileless simplicity and the Nurse's policy of convenience. Romeo is Hamlet in love, and lives in the world of imagination, abstracted from everything but his love. Perhaps his previous passion for Rosaline is an artifice to give us a higher opinion of Juliet who has power to drive it out. In the passionate scenes we see not only one passion in its force, but the slightest transitions from one to another.

*Lear* is the greatest play, where Shakespeare is most in earnest, and fairly caught in the web of his imagination. He deals with the deepest passion, the bond of which is hardest to unloose, and which, when cancelled, gives greatest revulsion to the frame. This depth of nature, this firm faith in filial piety, and the whirling tumult of the thoughts at finding such a prop failing it, the contrast between the immovable basis of natural affection and the starts of imagination wrenched from its accustomed resting-places in the soul, is what Shakespeare only could give. Only on *Lear's* character could such a story be truly built: his haste and blindness and impetuosity produce the misfortunes. Cordelia's part in the first scene is extremely beautiful, but in her indiscreet simplicity is a little of her father's obstinacy. Kent's remonstrance is the first burst of the noble tide of passion which runs through the play. The deliberate hypocrisy of Goneril and Regan adds the last finishing to the odiousness of their characters. The absence of hypocrisy is the only relief in the character of Edmund, and finally reconciles us to him: his religious honesty is admirable.

The first three acts of this play, and the third act of *Othello*, are Shakespeare's masterpieces in logic of passion. *Lear's* keen passions seem whetted on the stony hearts of his daughters. The Fool intervenes to prevent overstrain to the fibres of the heart, and his words present the old King's pitiable weakness in the most familiar point of view. The likeness of Edgar's assumed to *Lear's* real madness keeps up a unity of interest. If Shakespeare's mastery of his subject was not art it was knowledge of the connecting links of the passions, and their effect on the mind, and it surpasses anything done by adhering to rules. Of the scene which ends when *Lear* goes out into the storm, it may be said that no other author gives this yearning of the heart, these throes

of tenderness, and profound expression of all that can be thought and felt in the most heart-rending situations. The moralizing scenes in the hovel are in a style of pathos peculiar to Shakespeare, where extremest resources of the imagination are called upon to reveal the heart's deepest movements. The story of Gloster is interwoven as wonderfully in the way of art as the carrying on of the tide of passion is done on the score of nature. The meeting of Lear and Cordelia has all the wildness of poetry and all the heart-felt truth of nature. What relieves the oppression of the feelings at the end is the interest we take in the misfortunes of others, and the reflections to which they give birth. The greatest strength of genius is shown in describing the strongest passions. In proportion to the greatness of the evil is our sense and desire of the opposite good excited.

We do not love or respect Richard II, but he is unused to misfortune, and has no fortitude to bear it, and is human, so we sympathize with him. The sufferings of the man make us forget that he was ever a king. The noble persons in the play have neither honour nor principle, nothing but courage—and they do not shrink from falsehood when it may serve them. Bolingbroke is drawn with masterly hand; he sees his advantage from far, but only grasps it when within his reach, and builds power on opinion.

No more substantial comic character than Falstaff was ever invented. We know his person as well as his mind, and his jokes have double force from the quantity of flesh through which they make their way. His body is like a good estate to his mind, from which he receives rents and revenues of profit and pleasure; and his wit would be out of character were he less fat. He is no mere sensualist, for all this is as much in imagination as reality, and his sensuality does not stupefy his other faculties, but stimulates his brain. His imagination keeps up the ball after his senses have done with it, and he delights more in the exaggerated description than the fact. He talks about eating and drinking, but we never see him at table. He is known as liar, braggart, coward, glutton, but is so as much to amuse others, by showing the humorous side of these characters, as to gratify himself. We no more object to him morally than to the comedian who acts his part—for his actions have no mischievous consequences. The secret of his wit is masterly presence of mind and absolute self-possession; and he instinctively evades all that may interrupt the career of his triumphant jollity. The heroic part of these plays equals the comic; the characters of the Prince and Hotspur are the essence of chivalry, and two of the most beautiful ever drawn. Hotspur is the best because the most unfortunate. We cannot forgive the Prince's treatment of Falstaff—though Shakespeare must have known best, according to the history—yet Falstaff is the better man.

Henry V was a favourite with Shakespeare, who tries to apologize

for his actions, but he was careless, dissolute, ambitious, neglected private decencies, and in public had no idea of right or wrong, but brute force glossed over with religious hypocrisy and archiepiscopal advice. He could not govern, so made war on France, and blames the ambition of those who will not submit tamely. Such is the history of kingly power from the beginning to the end of the world. In these plays we see the spirit of the *good old times*, where the moral inference depends not on the nature of the actions, but the dignity or meanness of the persons committing them: e.g. 'eagle England' and 'weazel Scot'. Might was right in that heroic and chivalrous age.

In the three plays of *Henry VI* the groundwork is poor, but there are some brilliant passages, such as the death of Cardinal Beaufort, which is a masterpiece. Yet Shakespeare shows truth and subtlety in discriminating like characters; his people differ as they do in nature. Contrast Richard II and Henry VI: the one laments loss of power, the other regrets he has ever been king: and each is effeminate in a different manner. Shakespeare's Richard III strives to be greater than he is. The groundwork of intellectual vigour, mixed with moral depravity, gave full scope for Shakespeare's imagination.

The interest of *Henry VIII* is of a mild and thoughtful cast. The character of Queen Katharine is the most perfect delineation of matronly dignity, sweetness, and resignation that can be conceived; but she does not monopolize the beauty of the play, as Dr. Johnson said, for the scene of Buckingham led to execution is one of the most affecting and natural in Shakespeare. Only Shakespeare's genius could make pathetic the distresses of a proud, bad man like Wolsey. Henry is a disagreeable portrait by a master's hand: his power is most fatal to those whom he loves. No king can live near Shakespeare, for his eye penetrates through the pomp of circumstances and veil of opinion. A king impresses by power, splendour, and fear of consequences; but death cancels the bond of allegiance, and his pretensions look monstrous and ridiculous. No reader of history can be a lover of kings.

*John* is the last of the historical plays—and certainly imaginary themes are to be preferred. It gives soreness to our feelings of indignation or sympathy when we tread on real ground and recollect that the poet's dream 'denoted a foregone conclusion', beyond poetical justice. That John's treachery, Arthur's death, Constance's grief should be historically true, sharpens the sense of pain and depresses the imagination. We feel that we should not turn the truth of things into the puppet and plaything of our fancies. The painful subject of *John* is relieved by beautiful language and rich imagination. The King's character is but slightly marked; crimes are thrust on him by circumstances, and he is more cowardly than cruel. Yet few characters on the stage excite more disgust and loathing. He has no intellectual grandeur, and stands naked and defenceless to the worst we can think

of him. Besides, Arthur's beauty and helplessness and Constance's maternal despair make us put the worst construction on his meanness and cruelty. No scene in the world excites the extremes of terror and pity like that between Hubert and Arthur.

*Twelfth-Night* is one of the most delightful of the plays, perhaps too good-natured for comedy: it makes us laugh at the follies of mankind, not despise them. Shakespeare exaggerates the foibles of his characters in such a way that they would almost join in the humour rather than be offended. At a certain stage of society people become conscious of their peculiarities, affect disguise, and set up pretensions. Comedy aims to detect these disguises of self-love, and mark the contrast between the real and affected character. To this succeeds modern sentimental comedy where the materials of comic character have been neutralized by greater knowledge of the world or successful exposure on the stage. But in the period before these the foibles and follies of individuals are of nature's planting; and they are therefore unconscious of them and make no attempt to impose. The pleasure of the spectators is in humouring their inclinations. This is the comedy of nature—and it is Shakespeare's, akin to that of Cervantes and Molière, but more pastoral and poetical. He turns the meanest or rudest objects to a pleasurable account. He relishes the quaint humour of a low character as much as refined love. Sir Andrew is as low as can be in intellect and morals, yet Sir Toby makes of his weaknesses something 'high fantastical'. The best turn is given to everything instead of the worst, and the romantic and enthusiastic are infused in proportion as the characters are natural and sincere. There is none of the ridicule and indifference of the artificial style of comedy. But the poetical and impassioned passages are the best parts of the comedies. The most charming thing about *Twelfth-Night* is Viola, especially her confession of love. *Verona* is little more than the first outline of a comedy loosely sketched in—yet it has passages of high poetical spirit and inimitable quaintness of humour, and a careless grace and felicity characteristic of Shakespeare.

Shylock is a good hater, more sinned against than sinning, the depository of the vengeance of his race. There is justice mixed up with the gall and bitterness of his resentment. The desire of revenge is inseparable from the sense of wrong; and though his ferocity and pertinacity turn us against him we pity him in the end. In his answers and retorts he has the best of it; and his adversaries deny common justice and humanity with a Jew. They ask him a favour; he reminds them of former insults; and Antonio threatens to spurn and spit on him again! After this it is rank hypocrisy or blind prejudice to appeal to the Jew's mercy. The trial scene is a masterpiece of dramatic skill; and the keenness of his revenge awakes all Shylock's faculties. His character appears equally in less prominent parts of the play, and we may collect from a few sentences the history of his life. Portia has some



affectation and pedantry unusual in Shakespeare's women; and the casket scene is not admirable. We should like Jessica better if she had not deceived and robbed her father. The graceful winding up of the play, after the tragic business, is one of the happiest instances of Shakespeare's knowledge of the principles of the drama. In the *W. Tale* Shakespeare has united, as no one else could do, tragic passion, romantic sweetness, and comic humour. The crabbed and tortuous style of the speeches of Leontes, reasoning on his own jealousy, has every mark of Shakespeare's manner of conveying the painful struggle of different thoughts and feelings.

*All's Well* is one of the most pleasing comedies, but the interest is more serious than comic. Helena never violates the most scrupulous nicety of female modesty. If we could part with one of the comedies it would be *L.L.L.*, which savours more of the pedantic spirit of Shakespeare's time than his own genius. He has imitated faithfully the tone of polite conversation among the fair, witty, and learned. In *M. Ado* he hits nicely the middle point of comedy, where the ludicrous blends with the tender, and our follies, turning round against themselves to support our affections, retain only their humanity. *A.Y.L.* is the most ideal of the plays, where interest springs more from sentiments and characters than actions or situations. What is said imports, not what is done: caprice and fancy reign, and stern necessity is banished to the Court. The mild sentiments of humanity are strengthened with thought and leisure. Jaques is Shakespeare's only purely contemplative character; his whole occupation is to amuse his mind, and he values things but as they give food for reflection. Rosalind's tongue runs faster to conceal the pressure at her heart; and a needed foil is provided by the retiring Celia. Touchstone is not in love, but has a mistress in order to exercise his grotesque humour, and show his contempt for the passion by his indifference about the person. He is made up of ancient cynic philosopher and modern buffoon. Only the *Shrew*, of Shakespeare's plays, has a regular plot and downright moral. It shows how self-will is only to be defeated by stronger will. You cannot contend with a person like Petruchio on whom nothing makes impression but his own purposes.

*M. for M.* is as full of genius as wisdom, but there is original sin in the nature of the subject which prevents cordial interest—though 'the height of moral argument' is hardly surpassed elsewhere. There is want of passion; our affections are at a stand; and our sympathies are everywhere defeated. Angelo's passion seems greater for hypocrisy than for his mistress. Isabella's rigid chastity is at another's expense, and moves us less than if it were put to a less disinterested trial. The Duke is more absorbed in his own plots and gravity than anxious for the welfare of the State. The feelings of the different characters and the sympathy of the reader are at cross-purposes. If morality is made up

of antipathies Shakespeare is the least moral writer, for he sympathized with every kind of human nature. He showed the soul of goodness in things evil, and was a moralist as nature is one.

Falstaff of the *Wives* has neither wit, eloquence, nor love, but is an unsuccessful designing knave. Slender is the one first-rate character—and only Shakespeare could describe weakness as well as strength. The *Errors* does not improve on Plautus; and the interest depends on the plot's intricacy. We are teased as with a riddle which we yet try to solve.

Shakespeare only became himself by representing others: in expressing his own thoughts he was a mechanic. The schools had made words a substitute for things; and he was cooped in by technicalities of art and petty intricacies of thought. The cause may have been modesty and painful sense of personal propriety: for it was when he identified himself with the strongest characters that he grappled with nature and despised art. His own thoughts and feelings, standing alone, became a prey to established rules and practices. His poems are the reverse of his plays.<sup>1</sup> *Venus* and *Lucrece* are like ice-houses; he thinks of the verse, not the subject; it is splendid patchwork where the images do not blend. A digression is preferred to the story; feeling is kindled not from impulse of passion, but force of dialectics; and, as in painting, we are urged to *see* the feelings in the faces of the persons. The Sonnets, however, have a mild tone of sentiment, deep, mellow, and sustained. . . .

Hazlitt was less transcendental than Coleridge; he excels in knowledge of the passions and description of their earthly reactions. He was himself of strongly passionate nature, and had encountered numerous rubs and crosses in his journey through life. The effect was to sharpen his intellect and embitter his moral nature—and we see the result in his literary studies. He was something of a rebel, expressing sympathy for Napoleon: and this appears in his comments on *Henry V*, *Henry VIII*, and *Coriolanus*, and his praise of Cassius. Some knowledge of the world (in the conventional sense) mingles with his aesthetic insight—as when he suggests that Shakespeare took the side of the nobles in *Coriolanus* because he despised his own origin—that Isabella's chastity was at another's expense—that Romeo's previous passion for Rosaline was an artifice to give us a higher opinion of Juliet. If we compare the latter with Coleridge it gives us a fair idea of the difference between the transcendental and the practical-passionate critic. And yet Hazlitt is at his best in criticizing *R. and J.*—and the comparison would not be all in favour of Coleridge. That the lovers fear nothing but loss of the greatest possible happiness, and that expectation of pleasure is inexhaustible till experience kills it: here we have knowledge of the passions and their effect on the world equally balanced: and this applies to his

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Ten Brink.

remarks on Shylock. There is as much experience as meditation, and the intellect is keen, but not bitter. Hazlitt's personal experiences may also be read into his liking for the 'perfect womanly character'; and he remarks impressively that Cordelia's first part is 'extremely beautiful'.

There is a strong autobiographical accent in Hazlitt's criticism; but he differs from lesser men in that he gives to the personal universal interest. His inclinations stimulated his mental powers: as he says that Cassius's irritability sharpened his patriotism. A moving note to one of his miscellaneous essays<sup>1</sup> tells how he invariably succeeded in gaining access to the collections of pictures which he craved to view. The real passion in his soul caused the ideal feeling to become actual and take possession of his whole faculties, looks, and manner. Neither the surliness of porters nor the impertinence of footmen could keep him back, because he had a portrait of Titian in his eye: but he admits that had he wanted a place under government or a writership to India, he could not have got it from the same importunity. Thus we feel that there is the unique truth of personal experience in his estimates of Shakespeare's characters; and if the characters still transcend and elude, the critic has played as worthy a part as the underplot in one of the plays—e.g. *Lear*—that exalts the main action by contrast. And to speak of Hazlitt's love of pictures is to recall his tribute to Shakespeare's art. He sees each play as a picture, with the emotions delicately shading into perspective—and he expresses this best in *Cymbeline*.

The last three critics are in a class by themselves because they are romantics—and only from this enlarged point of view is it possible to appreciate Shakespeare. Maurice Morgann had remarked that Shakespeare's real characters differ from his apparent; and Mr. Lascelles Abercrombie says that romance appears 'when inner experience assumes the first importance, still more when it assumes the only importance, in the composite fact of life'.<sup>2</sup> Thus Coleridge and Lamb are purer romantics than Hazlitt; but, in the latter, the exchange of inner and outer produces a special effect. When he writes he has woken from his dream, but every stroke of his pen is influenced by the dream's poignant memory and its contrast with the harsh world. He is at his best, as we said, on *Romeo and Juliet* and *Shylock*; and his reasons stated in *John* for preferring imaginary to historical themes bring home to us that he had tried to realize heaven on earth and felt keenly his defeat. Perhaps the often-admired lines spoken by the Ghost to Hamlet express his spirit:

But, howsoever thou pursuest this act,  
Taint not thy mind, nor let thy soul contrive  
Against thy mother aught.

<sup>1</sup> *On Thought and Action*.

<sup>2</sup> *Romanticism*, p. 125. (Secker, 1926.)

They are the proof of affection persisting beyond the grave, in one who has traversed other worlds, but felt the passions of earth too keenly to reckon them an illusion. Such is the individual mark left by Hazlitt on the mass of Shakespeare appreciation.

## IV

COLERIDGE considers Shakespeare the greatest man who put on and put off mortality: prophet more than poet—as profound philosopher as great poet—with judgement equal to his genius—moralist and philosopher—in the absolute universality of his genius always reverencing what rises out of our moral nature—all, all ideal, of no time and therefore for all times. With much of this Hazlitt agrees—that he was as good a philosopher as poet—that his mind was the sphere of humanity—the most universal genius that ever lived—the kind of moralist who finds out the good in everything—having the greatest knowledge of humanity with the greatest fellow-feeling for it. Lamb finds his plays grounded so deep in nature that the depth lies out of the reach of most of us.

To Coleridge he had an intuitive knowledge of what man must be at all times under all circumstances; and to Hazlitt he saw everything by intuition. Coleridge and Lamb emphasize the fact that his characters were objects of meditation, not transcripts of reality. Coleridge describes Shakespeare's individual as a sort of class character, and says that he knew the human mind and its most minute and intimate workings. As a result of meditation his characters were intensely individualized; and he had surveyed all the component powers and impulses of human nature, and seen that their combinations and subordinations were individualizers of men. Hazlitt makes this more concrete with the remark that he appears to have been all the characters and in all the situations he describes. Lamb recognizes his absolute mastery over the heart and soul of man.

On the subject of women Coleridge and Hazlitt are agreed. Coleridge commends the mixture of real and ideal, and Shakespeare's perfection in portraying love and women's characters. The elements of womanhood were holy to Shakespeare, he says, and her nature all harmony. He adds that Shakespeare was fond of children. To Hazlitt Shakespeare's heroines are pure abstractions of the affections; and it seems to him that Shakespeare had a liking for the perfect womanly character whose strength lay in selflessness.

According to Coleridge he was above party, a philosophical aristocrat, venerating the established institutions of society, giving the permanent politics of human nature. In one place he describes Shakespeare as indulgent to the mob, in another he says that Shakespeare's only predilection was contempt of mobs. Hazlitt's views on

Shakespeare's politics are best seen in his remarks on *Coriolanus* and *Henry VIII*.

Lastly, we will compare tributes to Shakespeare's art. Coleridge's opinion is that he never introduces a word or thought in vain or out of place—that he never wrote at random—that he acted on laws arising within his own nature, not without law—that he was not irregular. Hazlitt considers him most careful of his plots—and compares his plays to pictures filled with subordinate examples of the same feeling.

The likeness between Coleridge's and Lamb's conception of Shakespeare's imagination has already been pointed out, and its importance noted.

Coleridge's voice is heard above that of Lamb and Hazlitt, and his influence, still vital, will predominate in the history of Shakespearian criticism for nearly a hundred years. He stamps his judgements with the authority of a seer, and elevates Shakespeare to a rank above the human. Like the Germans he is metaphysical: we lose sight of the real Elizabethan world, of the stage, of the audience, of the drama itself—and think of worlds beyond worlds—or of a vast abyss over which broods the spirit of Shakespeare.

## Chapter VIII

### ENGLAND 1817-1828

I. DRAKE. II. BOWDLER. III. DE QUINCEY. IV. SKOTTOWE.  
V. HARTLEY COLERIDGE. VI. CONCLUSION.

#### I

NATHAN DRAKE,<sup>1</sup> in speaking of the kind of education Shakespeare had been likely to receive, conjectures that the truth about his learning lay between Dr. Farmer and the other extreme; and he chronicles the visit of Elizabeth to Leicester at Kenilworth and its likely effect on the young poet; and credits Shakespeare with the power so to handle those popular superstitions, which the enlightened classes were shaking off, as to impress the strongest and most cultivated mind. He describes the universal rage for learning—how the nobleman and courtier must know Greek, Latin, and Italian—and thence, by means of translations, these languages spread through the whole nation. But, deepest influence of all, was the mysterious conception of the spiritual world—that it frequently intervened, either through departed spirits or superhuman beings. These beliefs favoured the highest poetry and did not oppose advancing philosophy. A copious language, national superstitions, wild Gothic beauties, playful Italian fiction, and some classic lore—all operated on native genius.

*Venus* equals contemporary narrative poetry in general structure of verse, but surpasses it in beauty, melody, force, and mechanism of stanzas. The one advantage of *Lucrece* is its unexceptional moral; the result of its greater labour has been to accumulate far-fetched imagery and fatiguing circumlocution. It would be well if the late Sonnets were ideal, since their subject is worthless, and so described in the strongest terms. No poet would publish anything so self-condemning—and they were intended to express the miseries of illicit love. As a sonnet writer, generally speaking, Shakespeare excelled his predecessors and contemporaries in force, dignity, and simplicity. Beneath a conventional surface we discover a rich ore of thought, imagery, and sentiment.

*Pericles* is undoubtedly Shakespeare's, and has uncommon variety and rapidity of incident. Perhaps Shakespeare accepted a collaborator, or worked up the rough sketch of a previous writer. His hand is distinct, though not frequent, in the first two acts, and he composed the whole of the remainder. *Pericles* is the model of knighthood, led astray by enthusiasm and susceptibility. The scene of the recognition of Marina is Shakespeare not in the infancy of his career, but approaching the zenith of his glory. Marina is akin to Miranda, Imogen, and

<sup>1</sup> *Sh. and his Times*, 1817.

Perdita. The portrait of Aegeon in the *Errors*, where we see the pressure of age and misfortune, dignifies one part of the fable, and contrasts with the lighter scenes. Considering the slight basis, and interest confined to deception of the external senses, Shakespeare has improved on the Plautian model. No play is more decisively juvenile than *L. L. L.*, nor, at the same time, more strongly imbued with the peculiar cast of Shakespeare's youthful genius. It is a continued contest of wit and repartee, with one unfortunate result—that an air of uniformity is thrown over the characters, who seem solely intent on keeping up the ball of raillery. But it has an intrinsic and inexplicable power to please, which the plays of other juvenile poets lack, and it is a sure guide to Shakespeare's genuine work.

Shakespeare's contributions to the *Henry VI* plays, compared with his former work, show greater dignity, severity, and tragic modulation, and in many instances are not inferior to his latest and most finished works. The most striking feature is strong and correct delineation of character. Henry's patient sorrow and plaintive morality amid desolations of warfare fascinate by contrast.

*M. N. D.* first shows Shakespeare's imagination fully developed. It has remarkable unity of feeling, and actually embodies the imagery of the most wild and fantastic dream. To be consistent, human beings must be part-visionary—so we see them subjected to illusion and enchantment and occupied only with love and amusement. There is no strong character: but Hermia and Helena are beautifully drawn and finely contrasted. The fairy mythology was the chief feature of a superstitious age, and Shakespeare remodelled and improved it. He naturalized in England only the softer parts of Gothic fairy lore; he makes his fairies sportive and kind; endows them with moral attributes of purity and benevolence; and dismisses those of malignant nature.

In *R. and J.* the highest tone of enthusiasm prevails, with purity, fidelity, and tenderness; and as their object is to represent perfectly the influence of love, they also express so much actual nature that our sympathy irresistibly augments and becomes overwhelming. We get all the emotions of which humanity is capable, perfectly blended, and contributing to a gradually increasing interest. Mercutio, the Friar, the Nurse, are all opposed, yet all essential to full development of plot. Shakespeare converts the *Shrew* into a lesson of exquisite moral irony. It has a depth and breadth of colouring and a boldness of relief which may be thought to border upon coarseness. Scarcely a page of *Verona* is without some just and useful maxim. Julia foreshadows Viola and Imogen.

Shakespeare's Richard III must have inspired Milton's Satan. Unmitigated depravity and consummate intellectual energy convert an otherwise loathsome and disgusting object into one of sublimity and shuddering admiration. Though a fiend in human shape, he has such

reserves of courage and intellect that we regard him with curiosity and grateful terror. He is surrounded by insignificant persons, except Margaret. They are reflected from his mirror, and become more or less developed as he acts upon them. Shakespeare only uses his power on Richard II when dethroned, so that we not only love and pity, but even admire him for his unexpected virtues of humility, fortitude, and resignation. Nothing in Shakespeare so produces the mingled emotions of compassion and esteem.

In *Henry IV* the Prince overshadows Hotspur because the latter has no social virtues but only military—whereas the Prince is equally brave, and also amiable and intellectual, and has the endearing arts of social intercourse. He tolerated Falstaff and his crew because he loved wit and humour, but he saw with conscious self-abasement their bad principles, and his strong mind and good heart saved him from contamination. Falstaff is the most complete and individualized character in the world: never have such contrasted qualities subserved the highest entertainment. He has no great vices or virtues, but is a tissue of the agreeable and disagreeable—and the former so prevails that the result is pleasurable emotion. He is no further vicious or interesting than he needs to be to attain his end of gratifying his animal appetites. Had he succeeded partially, and in the usual manner, he would have been contemptible, but he has succeeded beyond all other men and so gained a kind of lustre. He is a lover of wine, but never appears intoxicated. His social and intellectual qualities so blend with his vices that the latter lose their deformity. Yet Shakespeare achieves a striking moral effect when the Prince firmly dismisses Falstaff. The effect of dissipation is to harden the mind to honour or grandeur; and even wit and humour help to make the sensualist more self-deluded and self-satisfied.

Unity of feeling gives a uniform but extraordinary tone to every part of the fable of the *Merchant*. Because the bond is savage and eccentric the casket scenes must be singular, to produce dramatic consistency by skilful combination. Avarice and revenge appear other in Shylock than in a Christian. In Shakespeare's day Jews excited hatred and horror—and in this play we have the Jew as he appeared to the shuddering Christian, clothed with such passions that he might be the evil principle itself personified.

The key-note of *Hamlet* is in the words, 'the pale cast of thought'. Shakespeare has founded his want of volition on the temperament of genius of an exquisite and speculative kind. He is gifted to discern, but cannot act because his mind will explore to the utmost the possibilities of the meditated deed; and his tender nature makes him shrink from violence. The Ghost augments his irresolution and distress; he assumes madness and plays the alien part of insulting Ophelia. His bursts of gaiety, when he attempts to shake off the load of affliction, show his sufferings most distinctly. He spares the King at prayer, not for the



horrible reason he gives, for he was by nature amiable and gentle, but from the hypocrisy which untoward fate compelled him to exercise on himself. Our interest in the play is centred in the person of Hamlet, not in the events of the plot: we see his virtues become the bane of his earthly peace. Shakespeare has made the Ghost truly awful by hinting at a phase of popular belief that the dead did not return, but good or evil angels assumed their shapes. He invests purgatory with mysterious grandeur—nor does he deal elsewhere with the fate of the dead: his ghosts of Banquo and Caesar and others are but slight sketches.

What most interests in *John* is Constance's maternal grief: every shade of the emotion is presented as truthfully as nature herself. Falconbridge, though not very amiable, and interested and worldly minded, has the true Plantagenet spirit. In the scene between John and Hubert, equal to anything in Shakespeare, we see John's dark and turbulent soul lying naked, and shrinking even from its own vile purpose. Yet towards the end Shakespeare makes us feel pity and interest even for John's mean character. Helena of *All's Well* acts indiscreetly at first, but her later humility and tenderness atone for it. Bertram's faults are needed to make her more interesting; and Parolles is second only to Falstaff. Henry V is Shakespeare's darling offspring and has every regal virtue, and is versed in all the arts of government, policy, and war: yet no great events eclipse his former frank and gay character. Nor does his dignity suffer, for the comic parts are removed from the sovereign's person. The scene in *M. Ado* where Hero is disgraced is surpassed by that which restores her to happiness. Benedict—as formerly Mercutio—is an example of the gentleman and wit of Shakespeare's day. *A.Y.L.* shows us, through the Duke, Orlando, Jaques, how natural beauty, working through the charmed imagination, purges the mind of the corrosive sense of past affliction, and converts the workings of the mind into the sweetest sensations of the heart, into thoughtful endurance of adversity, and interchange of tenderest affection. Jaques's character is the result of falsely estimating human nature and society. The Falstaff of the *Wives* has lost nothing of his power to please. *T. and C.* is most singular and striking, an ironical copy of the great Homeric picture. Shakespeare designed to expose the absurdities of the Trojan war, and, in so doing, he has stripped the characters of their epic pomp, yet individualized and brought them nearer to us as men than Homer has done with all his splendid descriptions. The play's defect is that we can attach ourselves to no character except Hector. In *Timon* Shakespeare most excels in depicting, through Timon and Apemantus, different kinds and shades of misanthropy and its diversified effects on the heart of man. Timon is spoilt by excess of social virtue, which should have been the foundation of his happiness, but has become perverted into craving for applause. Apemantus is afflicted with envy, hatred, and malice. The charm of

*M. for M.* is Isabella, who moves through the corrupt world like a higher being.

The complex plot of *Lear*, appealing both to imagination and judgment, is one of its greatest beauties: so intimately do the two stories co-operate to produce the final result. The rapid incidents and vicissitudes and contrasted characters absorb every faculty of the mind and feeling of the heart. The vicious characters, in their ingratitude and cruelty, are such as might have been in the earliest heathen age of Britain—an age of lawless and gigantic power. But the virtuous agents show civilized manners and feelings, and are of the mixed fabric which alone portray justly the nature and composition of our species. No picture of misery has surpassed *Lear*—and his real madness is finely discriminated with Edgar's assumed. Edgar never touches the true source of his misery, *Lear* connects it with every object. That *Lear* does not feel the storm impresses us with the state of his mind. A picture of more terrible grandeur or wilder sublimity than the aged monarch's exposure to the storm was never imagined. The dialogue between *Lear* and *Edgar* is a proof of the boundless expansion of Shakespeare's mind; and the Fool heightens, while he means to alleviate, his master's distress. *Cymbeline* may not be perfectly constructed, but few plays surpass it in poetic beauty, variety, and truth of character, and display of sentiment and emotion. Its faults are trifling, its merits are of the essence of dramatic worth. It has that unity of character and feeling which is the test of genius, and without which no art will avail. *Imogen* is Shakespeare's most lovely and perfect woman; and he has given her a pathos and romantic wildness characteristic of him. *Macbeth* is his greatest work, and the most sublime and impressive drama in the world. There is no grander or more original picture than *Macbeth* himself. Too good to be tempted like a common villain, he must succumb only to supernatural powers acting on his vulnerable point of ambition. Placed between hell and his fiend-like wife, he brings about the most awful catastrophe on dramatic record. His will remains so far free that Shakespeare can express man's strongest passions. Originally humane and gentle enough to dismiss temptation, he is confused by the predictions of the Weird Sisters, instantly accomplished, and so appearing like destiny, and hiding the truth that the crime, at which he first shuddered, springs from man's nature. Victim of remorse, he feels deserted by God and man; and the fear of retaliation from man revolutionizes his character. The plot is a perfect cycle of incidents and passions on a scale equal to nature. In the witch scenes Shakespeare has separated with exquisite skill the ludicrous and frivolous from the solemn and awful. By simply passing through his own mind what is inherent in the general mind—the idea of mighty invisible powers—he makes us still feel the same terror as when the play was first produced. Even when the witches speak

among themselves, their words are so peculiar and mysterious that we fear them.

The catastrophe of *J.C.* is not the fall of Caesar, but of Brutus. To the virtues Plutarch gives him, Shakespeare adds the deeper interest of a sweet and gentle disposition. His grandeur and superiority to others spring from the struggle between his humane temper and ardent and hereditary love of liberty. Events are so concentrated and unified that, while historical truth is preserved, a small portion of an immense chain of incidents is moulded into a perfect whole. The canvas of *A. and C.* is wider, and the varied groups are either crowded or isolated or out of perspective, so that the hurried mind cannot take in the stream of incidents, for the introduction and succession of which it is not sufficiently prepared. Yet there is a pleasing copiousness, and one's attention never languishes, and in three characters Shakespeare gives the freshness of existing energy to the records of distant ages.

The *Tempest* is Shakespeare's next noblest work to *Macbeth*. It combines what is wild and wonderful with the sportive sallies of a playful imagination. Within three hours are assembled, in the most dramatically probable manner, the most extraordinary incidents and characters ever generated by fancy. The vulgar magic of the day is elevated by Prospero's moral dignity and philosophic wisdom. Shakespeare distinguished between the two orders of professors of magic: those who commanded superior intelligences, and those who submitted to be the instruments of these powers, viz. magicians or necromancers, and wizards. From crude material he drew the elements of beauty, sublimity, and awful wonder—and unfolded a picture of what human skill and science might attain, and added the philosophy of poetry to his spiritual world.

*Othello* is below the great tragedies and the *Tempest*, but above the other plays. Characters and incidents are closely copied from the novel. Like a strong contrast of Rembrandt is that between Othello and Desdemona: the storm of vindictive passion and absolute tenderness and humility. Othello is grand and sublime, despite his sensual jealousy which burns in him like the fervours of his native climate; for he is open, magnanimous, grateful, affectionate. Iago would be insupportable, but for his insight into human thought and feeling which excites interest and curiosity.

*Twelfth-Night* surpasses by its exquisite finish. Its serious and humorous scenes are tinted with those romantic hues which impart to passion the fascinations of fancy. Scene iv of Act II breathes the blended emotions of love, hope, despair. In certain scenes wit and raillery are finely blended with touches of original character and strokes of poignant satire.

Separation is the essence of the romantic drama, combination of the modern. What produced the romantic drama was the influence of

Christianity and chivalry acting on stern Teutonic virtues. Seriousness, sentiment, love, honour, enterprise, adventure led to aspiration after the great, the wonderful, the wild. The melancholy of a sublime religion, combined with enthusiastic homage for female worth, made life anxious, and the poetry of the Middle Ages awful and mysterious. The thought of death, dashing hope with fear, the recoil from the thought of extinction, the regret for earthly love, appear with more appalling strength in Shakespeare than in any other poet. Shakespeare harmonizes comprehensively virtues, vices, follies, frailties, levities, mirth. Thus the romantic drama is a distinct order of art, with laws of its own, and the most perfect and profound. The unities Shakespeare observes are action and feeling; and the latter rules not only with characters, but the entire drama: e.g. *R. and J.* embodies the freshness, innocence, and transience of youth and spring; *Macbeth* is a tempest of midnight horror and human vice and passion. Thus to effect a combined and uniform impression proves his deep and comprehensive mind; and it is the more extraordinary because nothing in his conduct of the drama is more prominent than the mixture of seriousness and mirth, of comic and tragic effect, which springs from the very structure of the romantic drama. His ludicrous characters aid the predetermined effect of the whole play: viz. the Fool in *Lear*. By embracing in one view the whole chequered human scene he has eclipsed the ancients. He knew man as genus and species, alone and in society; he knew all that had influenced man's character from the beginning; and he knew intimately man's moral, intellectual, and religious constitution. His characters do not develop themselves by self-description, but through events and reactions. His poetry is as inspired as that of Homer, Dante, Milton, and besides has the insinuating loveliness that once charmed our earliest youth. We find some coarseness and indelicacy, but not such as to excite passion or flatter vice; and his morality pervades every part. In every page we see his gentle, benevolent character and good heart; for though no one better painted strong passions, he delighted most in loveliness and simplicity. Numerous passages breathe pious gratitude and devotional rapture. . . .

The best criticism of the time was romantic, and Drake to a certain extent was romantic minded. He does well to remind us of the origins of the romantic drama, and to note its comprehensiveness. From these two data spring his best average remarks on Shakespeare: viz. the inexplicable power of *L.L.L.* to please—the causes of the *Merchant's* unity, and the distinguishing nature of Shylock's passions—the effect of natural beauty on the characters in *A.Y.L.*—the harmonious blending of satire and romance in *Twelfth-Night*. But the romantic critic plays his best part, not in recording intellectual impressions, but in attempting to explain, during the hour of meditation, the impressions

from his reading by the help of his own spiritual experience; and where Drake enriches his subject is in treating Shakespeare's supernatural scenes. Though this accounts for his judgement that the *Tempest* is the greatest play after *Macbeth*, it inspires his comments on the witches in *Macbeth*—that they produce the same terror now as then, and how strangely they speak to each other; and also his note of the error into which the living may fall about the nature of 'revenants'. Next best is his manner of interpreting solitary passions, which may be said to lie between natural and supernatural, such as that which King John discovers in his heart like an alien presence.

Drake's fault, like those of his kind, is that he becomes dazzled with Shakespeare and sees false reflections. Even Coleridge over-commended certain scenes, such as the quarrel between Brutus and Cassius. Drake praises excessively Richard II, and Henry V whom he takes at his obvious value, assigning to him every regal virtue, and rating Falstaff's dismissal as a striking moral effect. He finds an undiminished Falstaff in the *Wives*, and considers Parolles a worthy second to Falstaff. That the scene of Hero's restoration surpasses, in his opinion, that of her disgrace, is a further confusion between intrinsic and extrinsic. His confident remarks on Shakespeare personally—his nature and morals and religion—are those of his time. The last hundred years have at least added diffidence to methods of defining the inner self of a dramatic poet.

## II

THOMAS BOWDLER<sup>1</sup> acknowledged Shakespeare to be the world's greatest dramatic poet, but regretted that no parent could place the uncorrected book in the hands of his daughter, and therefore prepared the *Family Shakespeare*. It seemed to him that this process of correction could easily be applied to Shakespeare because, when the indecent words were expunged, in almost every instance there was gain to the sense of the passage and spirit of the author. The Porter scene in *Macbeth* disgraces the most sublime effect of the dramatic muse, and no one could be offended at its omission. Three scenes may be mentioned totally unconnected with the plays to which they belong, the insertion of which, not the omission, forms the interruption: as if the wretched taste of the age compelled Shakespeare to insert in his finished play something ludicrous to raise a momentary laugh. There is the dialogue between the French Princess and her attendant in *Henry V*, totally unconnected with all that precedes and follows. Also the odious ribaldry of the conversation between Doll Tearsheet and the Beadle in *2 Henry IV*. Thirdly, the tedious and offensive fourth scene of the fifth act of *1 Henry VI*. It would not be hard to separate the dross from the metal in all but a few of the plays, and thereby improve rather than

<sup>1</sup> *A Letter to the Editor of the British Critic*, 1823.

injure the dramatic effect. The exceptions are *M. for M.*, the two plays of *Henry IV*, and *Othello*. Wantonness of expression and action are closely connected with Falstaff; and Othello's passions of rage and jealousy are hardly to be regulated. To erase Othello's bitter reproaches and execrations would alter his character, abolish the horror of his passions, and destroy the tragedy. . . .

It is needless to criticize Bowdler seriously, and his name was for long used in a proverbial sense; but his remarks that certain scenes may be withdrawn without injury to the rest have some interest at the present, despite his different reasons. And it is noteworthy that he lays a disintegrating hand on *Henry V*.

### III

DE QUINCEY founds his celebrated paper—*On the Knocking at the Gate in Macbeth* (1823)—on the impression of awfulness and deep solemnity which the said event produced upon him from a boy. Ordinary murder throws the interest entirely on the natural law of self-preservation in the victim: it is the poet's duty to transfer it to the murderer. We cannot sympathize with him, but must enter into his feelings. The storm in his mind creates in him a hell—and into this we must look. With Macbeth and Lady Macbeth we are made to feel, by dialogue and soliloquy, that their human nature—the divine nature of love and mercy—has vanished, and the fiendish nature taken its place. How is this consummated? If the reader has ever seen a loved one in a fainting fit, he will know that the most affecting moment is when a sigh announces the return of suspended life. Or, at the funeral of a great national idol, when streets are silent and deserted, he may have noted, when the first sound of wheels rattling away from the scene breaks the death-like stillness, that never was his sense of the complete suspension in human life so full as when the suspension ceases. Action is best measured by reaction. Here the human heart has retired, the fiendish heart has entered. To convey this, a new world must step in and the present world disappear. The murderers must be insulated, cut off from the tide and succession of human affairs. The world of ordinary life is suddenly arrested, and time annihilated. When the deed is done the knocking at the gate makes known audibly that the reaction has commenced. The pulses of life begin to beat again, and the re-establishment of the world's goings on makes us profoundly sensibly sensible of the awful parenthesis. . . .

Here again is the finest romantic criticism, only to be compared with that of Lamb and Coleridge. It was Coleridge who affirmed that poetry should instil that energy into the mind which compels the imagination to produce the picture; and we ask ourselves what discovery De Quincey's spirit has made in its voyage through Shake-

spearian space? The answer is, that finest kind of unity of feeling which is the best tribute to Shakespeare's art, and puts to shame those who argue about the unities in the abstract. De Quincey was a poet who worked backward from a single haunting impression; the feeling preceded the thought; and his criticism convinces the more because it is emotional rather than intellectual, related by metaphors to his whole experience of life.

## IV

AUGUSTINE SKOTTOWE,<sup>1</sup> like Drake, takes us all through Shakespeare's life and writings. He recalls the Mysteries and Moralities and the part they played in the developing English drama, and he points out that it had always been the fashion to mingle serious and comic business in the same play. This is important, because in his Preface he decides that Shakespeare was a greater comic than tragic writer, and therefore introduced comic scenes into tragic plays. He did equally well in the then state of criticism to point out how far Shakespeare followed or departed from his historical authorities, such as More and Holinshed. He censures former editors like Steevens and Malone because they lacked poetic feeling; but though he himself was not without it, he cannot pass it into his criticism. He leaves the impression that Shakespeare was an ingenious playwright who turned his materials to the best uses, rather than one who fetched down Promethean fire.

In *John* he disentangles those scenes the merit of which is entirely Shakespeare's: such as where the King works upon Hubert to kill Arthur. No deeper pathos occurs in Shakespeare, he says, than when Hubert yields to human feelings. Equally does Shakespeare temper the rage of Constance into vehemence, her clamour into eloquence, and her coarse vindictiveness into a deep sense of gross injuries and undeserved misfortunes. His magic genius expands Holinshed's brief notice of Richard II's character into a perfect picture of intellectual cowardice. It is an exquisite poem, but indifferent play, lacking variety and contrast of character, quick succession of incidents, animated and interesting dialogue. In *Henry IV* he judiciously contrived that the Prince's mental superiority should never be lost sight of, despite his associates. He follows neither Holinshed nor the old play in the Prince's interview with his father (III. ii). With great art the King passes from blaming his son's conduct to contrasting it with his own, and then eulogizes Percy. Throughout *Henry V* Shakespeare's fire illuminates the cold narrative of Holinshed and exalts the King. The rejection of Falstaff is in Holinshed, but Shakespeare has him committed to the Fleet. If meant to be comic, it fails, since the destruction of a hope which the King himself had created was not a subject for

<sup>1</sup> *Life of Sh., &c.*, 1824.

laughter. Only a few lines of *1 Henry VI* are Shakespeare's; but in Parts II and III he has made some good additions to the old play—such as the character of Richard, Duke of Gloucester. All Richard's passions are subordinated to ambition, but a broad vein of humour relieves his prevailing brutal ferocity. The idea was not entirely Shakespeare's, but he polished, invigorated, and corrected much of what he found rude, uncouth, feeble, or injudicious in his predecessor, and particularly gave shape and consistency to the character of the Duke of Gloucester. One passion engrosses Richard III—to attain the crown. The scene where he woos Lady Anne hardly consists with his previously expressed opinion that it would be preposterous for him to assume the character of a lover. Shakespeare keeps the historian in view throughout: e.g. Sir T. More's narrative suggested the starting of the affrighted tyrant from his couch. And Richard's famous call for a horse can be traced to the old play. Richard himself is the one object of interest, yet his character is only excellently displayed in the early scenes of the play. The general arrangement of the play is below most of Shakespeare. In *Henry VIII* Shakespeare converts Holinshed into action and dialogue, but interweaves, as no one else could do, much worldly knowledge and delicious poetry. He follows Holinshed in delineating Wolsey. Queen Katharine's speech in Court defending her marriage is copied literally from Holinshed, except that prose is turned to verse. Such were the historical materials which helped him to accomplish one of his greatest triumphs in exciting pathetic feeling, and displaying, as never before, the calm confidence of a Christian spirit about to return to heaven.

Shakespeare adds little to the already feeble story of *Verona*. His new characters are sketches, but Launce and the dog are his. In the women are germs of much future feminine eloquence; and there is much sweet and graceful poetry. *L.L.L.* is Shakespeare's own, and devoid of dramatic interest: but Rosaline foreshadows Beatrice. The characters of Theseus and Hippolyta in *M.N.D.* are devoid of interest; but Shakespeare reconciles most incongruous materials, viz. the fairy mythology of modern Europe, the early events of Greek history, and characters like Snug, Bottom, Flute, Snout, Starveling. The four lovers, as individuals, do not merit much notice, but their cross-purposed love is ingeniously managed through three several changes. Bottom and his friends are probably a picture of the green-room politics of the Globe. The original Shrew-tamer was rough, stern, inflexible: but Shakespeare's Petruchio only assumes these qualities. He is highly humorous, and never fails to illumine his fits of anger with imagination or wit. Most of all the plays it is a previous performance merely altered.

Shakespeare adapted ill his borrowed plot of *R. and J.*, especially the concluding circumstances which are more affecting in the Italian



novel and better calculated for dramatic effect. But Juliet's soliloquy, before taking the potion, is an instance of his unique power of adapting the materials of others to his own purpose. And no writer realized the advantage of contrast more than Shakespeare: and his appears in the distinct and individual character of Mercutio—his own addition to the play. Mercutio is interwoven with its business and helps its progress; his brilliant wit is a foil to the amorous sighs of Romeo and Juliet, and after his death the shadows seem deeper by contrast. The loves of Romeo and Juliet gain a charm of delicacy and pathos to which they could make no pretension before he treated the subject.

In the *Pecorone*, whence Shakespeare drew the plot of the *Merchant*, the Jew's reasons for the pound of flesh are unintelligible. Shakespeare makes good the defect, and ascribes Shylock's action to the combined malignant passions of avarice and religious animosity. Shylock is fierce, cruel, relentless, but dignified by intellectual vigour: and thus Shakespeare's skill preserves him from contempt. His deliberate actions proceed from his bold and masculine understanding. Antonio is an absolute contrast to Shylock, but the portrait is elegant rather than brilliant. Shakespeare aimed to improve existing materials, and shunned the labour of originating anything entirely new. To the original of *A.Y.L.* he added a beautifully romantic and harmonious strain of poetry and sentiment. He gave to Orlando the qualities which show a really pre-eminent character. He repines feelingly and justly at his degradation, and with noble spirit claims to be a gentleman. Lodge's heroine cannot compare with Shakespeare's quick-witted Rosalind, who combines, with a heart of exquisite sensibility, a buoyancy of spirit that defies the changes of fortune. Her disguised wooing does not even appear improbable, so playful is its form. Celia is far less brilliant, but makes amends by disinterested affection. Touchstone, Audrey, and Jaques are Shakespeare's own. He treats Jaques as skilfully as Mercutio, recognizing the revolt from dissipation of a powerful and highly cultivated mind. Jaques confers upon the play unusual weight and dignity for comedy: the contrast of his sombre reflections heighten rather than detract from the effect of its high-wrought comedy. He does not damp the comedy with the gloom of misanthropy because better feelings predominate, and his dry humour or good-natured badinage take away the effect of asperity. Don John's causeless hatred of Claudio (*M. Ado*) is inadequate; but Shakespeare deviates well from the story in making Dogberry and Verges the discoverers of the plot. Benedict and Beatrice are scarcely linked to the main action; but the latter, whom Shakespeare added, gives the play its charm. They are alike in mind, and on this likeness is based their hostility.

Hamlet's conduct is often inconsistent with his mild and affectionate nature: but this is the artificial side of his nature. Shakespeare has not distinguished broadly between Hamlet's assumed and natural

dispositions, and hence the obscurity. He was undoubtedly attached to Ophelia, but he treats her roughly because in the history she was set to spy on him. The history helps to illustrate the character of Hamlet because it assigns rational motives for otherwise unintelligible actions, and lays the foundation for the necessary distinction between his natural and artificial character. To Ophelia Shakespeare contributed all that makes her interesting; but he marred his original image of Laertes by making him turn traitor, as a means to end the play. The grave-digger scene is absolutely unconnected with the plot, and debases Shakespeare's sublimest work.

Falstaff of the *Wives* was inconsistent with Falstaff of *Henry IV*. The latter had no spark of personal vanity; his fatness was the exhaustless theme of his own laughter, and he would have suspected wagery in women's advances. Shakespeare borrowed the idea and incidents, but made happy changes: though he added the underplots of Evans and Caius and Anne Page to make the play the right length—yet these are skilfully grafted on the main design. The sources of *T. and C.* were Caxton and Chaucer, but there is a strange contradiction in Shakespeare's treatment of Cressida. Caxton called her 'wise'; Chaucer, 'wise', 'charitable', 'tender-hearted'; but Shakespeare makes her shamelessly inconstant. He did not copy the language of his originals, but, in assigning speeches, kept in view the general impression of characteristic features of Greek and Roman leaders. If it is difficult to recognize Homeric heroes, we must remember that he drew from a polluted source. Claudio's sophistical arguments (*M. for M.*) were due to Whetstone, and so was the abject character of Mariana. In the Duke Shakespeare followed his own conceptions; but Barnardine is his only original character, and he makes a distinct mark despite his brief appearance.

An instance where Shakespeare overpowers Cinthio is when he makes Othello recoil from the proof he asked for as too horrible. He means Emilia's doubtful virtue to colour Iago's hatred of Othello and persecution of Cassio, and to explain her theft of the handkerchief and criminal silence about it. The drama has a highly natural air, because every event seems to spring from the will of one or other of the characters, all of whom differ in nature and disposition; and they act, therefore, perfectly in accord with nature. Though *Lear* involves the fate of royalty, its tale is of a domestic nature. The King of the old play desponds and yields to fate; but Shakespeare's *Lear* is full of energy and rage. To the rudest materials Shakespeare added exquisitely delicate touches of nature, and created forms of pure and perfect beauty. Little space is allotted to Cordelia, yet she is next in consequence to *Lear*. She is the perfect female character, and exists nowhere else in Shakespeare or any other writer. Edmund is Shakespeare's clearest and most vigorous second-rate character; his double deceptions rank him scarcely

below Iago. Lear's madness is due to Shakespeare's genius only: out of his deep knowledge of human nature he traced a mind and heart like Lear's through all the wanderings of insanity. The two plots are so skilfully interwoven that it soon becomes impossible to disconnect them; and the underplot is made the means of promoting the ends of retributive justice.

The comic scenes of *All's Well* are Shakespeare's and show no great ingenuity. Parolles is entirely unconnected with the fable, but he is infinitely entertaining. The Countess is Shakespeare's; but the characters as a whole are not forcible. Bertram has little or no character, and might have been the agent of almost any other event. Shakespeare has removed much levity from the original Helena, but nothing can purge her of the stain of pursuing a man who hated her. Wisdom and goodness hardly unite with boldness and indiscretion.

*Macbeth* at times deviates from Holinshed for the sake of scenic effect. The Banquo of history was equally guilty, but Shakespeare makes him a pattern of loyalty and virtue as a compliment to James I—since the Scottish royal family were descended from Banquo. Lady Macbeth most illustrates the grandeur of Shakespeare's matchless powers. From a mere sketch in Holinshed she was wrought by Shakespeare into a character so sublime as to outdo the finest works of the Greek tragedians. Unhappily he omitted the gradations of her mind, and reduces her at once to an abject state—from her full vigour to miserable imbecility. Macbeth's fall is due to superstition; but virtue and reason are never overthrown in his mind; and the power of hell itself cannot destroy his perception of right from wrong, or stifle the just reproaches of conscience. He has nothing of the ordinary tyrant, but shows, throughout his long career of blood, his original virtue and naturally good heart. Lady Macbeth is the victim of a horror that one cannot define, since she shows no remorse, but is alarmed by the recollection of deeds which made no impression when they were done. Macbeth's affliction is that of conscience; he shudders to think of his deeds, but has no other kind of fear. Shakespeare's idea was to trace the progress of the mind from its first departure from virtue to the last stage of wickedness, aggravated by superstition. The witches address Macbeth in the decisive tone of absolute and directing powers; they discourse of the events of futurity as of matters absolutely certain. Macbeth does not act as he believes: he was told his issue should not reign, and should have believed both predictions or neither; but in neither case does he abide the event.

Shakespeare distinguishes Viola (*Twelfth-Night*) from Bandello's heroine by fascinating tenderness, pathetic eloquence, and a thousand charms of mental grace. The incidents of the plot occupy few scenes, and, apart from Viola, interest settles in Aguecheek, Belch, and Malvolio. They are all Shakespeare's creations, and contribute little

to the progress of the story. Malvolio's self-conceit is often clad in the garb of modesty, so fine is Shakespeare's tact.

Shakespeare excels in depicting Brutus when he departs from Plutarch. He paints a beautiful picture of Brutus's calmness and dignity, well sustained by his philosophy. His words on Portia's death are few, yet they reveal his agony of mind—an instance of Shakespeare's power to produce extraordinary effects by simple means, Cassius panted to possess the uncontrolled sway which he condemned in others. Since he was associated with Brutus, he must needs have some claim to be his equal, and so Shakespeare has said little of his vindictiveness, &c., and stresses his fire and energy, while in penetration he exceeds Brutus. Antony (*A. and C.*) no doubt was munificent, but insatiably rapacious and wantonly cruel. He patiently suffered hardships in war; but the contrast of his luxury in peace is too strong. Shakespeare has repressed his cruelty, and enlarged on his courage, constancy, nobility, and generosity. He does not convey to us an idea of the elegance of Cleopatra's mind: she fails to convince us that she possesses the accomplishments he ascribes to her. It is the one of the three Roman plays where he has least indulged his fancy. He adheres minutely to his authority and takes little pains to adapt history to the purposes of the drama, except for ingenious and elegant metrical arrangement of North's humble prose. It was hard to excite interest in such a hero as Coriolanus, but Shakespeare did it by making him arrogant and passionate against the rabble and their tribunes only—while in his social relations he is modest, amiable, and affectionate. In Shakespeare it is the question of distributing corn that makes the plebeians revolt, and therefore Coriolanus in resisting them appears politically wise. He was right in principle, but wrong in its application, because intemperate: and Shakespeare omits his self-possession.

*Cymbeline* combines Italian fancy with the gloom of early English story, and though the curiously interwoven events are often hopelessly perplexed, Shakespeare has thrown a charm over the original naked stories. The fine poetry which he lavishes on Iachimo is an excuse for leaving him the same commonplace villain as in the novel. Cloten interests because he is a natural fool—yet he often talks with the wit of one of Shakespeare's professed fools. He loves Imogen, but hates her because she despises him; and hatred predominates because vanity is the characteristic of a fool. *Timon* shows the influence of Lucian, viz. Timon's reflections on the gold, the use to which he puts the gold, the marriage and dowry. Only Shakespeare could have produced two distinct misanthropists in the scene—Timon and Apemantus. Few scenes surpass the close of the *W. Tale* for interest and stage effect; but otherwise Shakespeare has succeeded rather in delineating the characters than improving the story. Paulina has a good heart and good intentions, but uncourtly manners: her candour is ill-bred bluntness

and her vehemence vulgar passion. An air of refined sentiment distinguishes Florizel from his original. The amusing awkwardness of the shepherd and his son at court was Shakespeare's own conception. Magic is the theme of the *Tempest*—the mystery thrown over science, as it appeared to the illiterate who knew nothing of the powers of nature. By making a magician his hero, Shakespeare gave to magic a grandeur it had never known. Prospero has unlimited power, but uses it moderately, and only in the cause of retributive justice—because judgement, not passion, directs his actions. Purified of sordid motives, the character of the magician becomes eminent and imposing. His excellent intentions throw a lustre over his dealings with the powers of darkness. How great he is appears in Ariel's obedience to him. The wit of the low characters has the gusto which marks Shakespeare's delight in delineating the humour of vulgar minds. The time is less than four hours, but the events are unnaturally precipitated, and leisure fails for those changes of mind which precede all human actions. . . .

No one can call Skottowe a fine critic, and the time we have spent upon him may seem excessive; yet he is a critic of a peculiar nature who can effect something by quantity that he cannot by quality. Specimens of his criticism import little, but an outline of the whole can teach us something. He does a useful piece of work in disentangling Shakespeare's portion from his authorities—More, Holinshed, Plutarch, the Italian novelists, &c., which shows him selecting and rejecting, and therefore throws a transverse light upon his mind. His object seems to be to prove that Shakespeare's choice was justified or not according as he created more excellent drama in the technical sense—and his criticism is a by-product. At times his lapses are notable, as when he condemns the grave-digger scene, or speaks of Mariana's 'abject' character, or misreads the nature of Lady Macbeth's remorse. He censures Paulina—yet we think that her goodness forms one of the ultimate impressions of the *W. Tale*. He utterly misinterprets *A. and C.*, because he looks at it in the light of common day as a mere historical event. But there are some penetrating judgements to be placed upon his credit side. He is right to say that Henry V destroyed in Falstaff the hope which he himself had raised. It comes not amiss that Richard III, in wooing Lady Anne, acted the part of lover which he had disclaimed for himself. It is true that the original Falstaff had no vanity, and this conflicts with the Falstaff of the *Wives*. The effect on the action of Mercutio, Jaques, and Emilia is described in such a way as to enlighten their characters. Above all, the characters of Malvolio and Cloten are finely touched; and the skill with which the underplot of *Lear* is managed is brought home to us. Macbeth does not act as he believes, in accepting one half of the witches' prophecy and attempting to foil the other half. We see from Skottowe that no one can commune

honestly with Shakespeare's mind without gaining strength: like the children who unknowingly ate the heart and liver of the magic fowl, and woke next morning with the gold pieces ringing on their pillow.

## V

ACCORDING to Hartley Coleridge<sup>1</sup> Shakespeare respected established order and never sought to desecrate what time and the world's consent have sanctified. If he ridicules the member of a profession, the ridicule is individualized, and does not diffuse itself over the profession in general: e.g. the medical faculty are not concerned in the starved apothecary of *R. and J.* Only a gentleman of genius can embody gentility in an imaginary portrait; and Shakespeare's intended gentlemen-characters are always so. He depicts the low and is untainted—Falstaff, Doll, Quickly—and only a high-souled gentleman could have conceived them. Above all, he shows kind respect and reverential love of womanhood. Only villains or jealous husbands utter sarcasms on women—or men like Hamlet and Lear who have found depravity in particular women. His women think and speak as would do the best women of our acquaintance. He sublimates to poetry their actual qualities, including household affections. With Cressida and Cleopatra he seems to soothe while he upbraids; and because Goneril and Regan are so hideous, no woman can discover a single trait of herself in them. Lady Macbeth, after all, is a woman, and inspires terror and amazement, not horror and disgust.

Shakespeare was a true Tory, with faith in the divine purpose—and he deduced man's rights and duties not from his animal nature, but from the demands of the complex life of the soul and body. The Tories would raise social institutions to their standard of human nature, even if it is an ideal one. Shakespeare admired the British state because it represented permanent man, and made due provision for every demand of his complicated nature. His mind was the mirror of humanity; he knew himself and therefore all men. No one ever better distinguished the varieties of human nature, or grasped the mighty truth that in all its varieties it is one and the same—the law and measure of relative morality.

Like Homer he creates men and women, not heroes and heroines. Grandeur of intellect, feeling, imagination exalt them: they are not remote from ordinary cares. The Greek drama seems artificial beside his; but Homer is liker him, being minute and individualizing. Homer's characters have passions more energetic and violent, but not more refined and spiritualized than those of common experience.<sup>2</sup> This homely circumstantiality was proper to Homer's genius, and would not

<sup>1</sup> *Sh. a Tory and a Gentleman; On the Character of Hamlet*, 1828.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Professor Bradley on Sh.'s tragic characters.

have left him had he sung in the most Frenchified period of vicious refinement. Homer was the Shakespeare of his age, the poet of action, and passion as it produces action—of human nature as embodied in sensible effects. He did not know the mysterious inner world and the dread secret of the hidden will. But Shakespeare's intellect was also metaphysical and even theological: he transcended nature and discovered in man's soul instincts, prophetic yearnings, unutterable vacuities of spirit, which nothing in the sensible or intellectual world can satisfy. *Macbeth* and *Hamlet* prove the evil and confusion which enter the moral world when natural and supernatural beings sensibly communicate. *Macbeth*'s impetuous nature was impelled from crime to crime; and with *Hamlet*'s meditative spirit the result was a paralytic will.

*Hamlet* is not feeble and fragile, as Goethe said. He fearlessly speaks to the Ghost; there is no female softness in his musings; and his anguish is stern and masculine. His serious discourse is more austere, philosophic, almost prosaic, than any character in Shakespeare. It is not the duty, but the irregular means by which it has become known, that weighs on him. He is wise in words, useless in action; his abstract intellect overbalances his active impulses. Longing for death is the bass accompaniment of his character, and he delights to contemplate human nature in the dust. The spring of hope is so dried up in him that it flows not at the prospect of immortality. The Ghost should remove every doubt of hereafter, but the revelation finds no companion in his mind, and remains an exception or isolated wonder that can produce no living faith; and he almost forgets the spectre in the father. The Ghost is said to speak like a Catholic—but it asks for vengeance, not prayers and masses. Purgatory is older than Christianity, and it was the best hypothesis on which the Ghost could be introduced. A spirit from heaven, demanding vengeance, would not inspire sympathy; and revenge, even for such a murder, was an imperfection to be purged away. Yet to *Hamlet*, a son and a mortal, no motive of revenge could be so mighty as these purgatorial pangs which premature death had inflicted on a virtuous parent.

He assumes madness to conceal from himself and others his real distemper. His mind is lord over itself, but not master of his will, and therefore subject to incalculable impulses. But to act madness and wilfully distort the mind, for whatever purpose, may stamp its lineaments with irrecoverable deformity; therefore he wrings *Ophelia*'s heart. He is severed from human hopes and joys, yet inconsistently feels her repulse, and discharges upon her the bitterness of blasted love. The famous soliloquy is strictly in character. He is said to express inconsistent belief in a hereafter, though he had seen the Ghost. An apparition, however, might confirm such faith where it pre-existed, but where that faith was not, or was neutralized by inward misery, it would per-

plex rather than convince. In the first soliloquy he speaks like a Christian, in the second like a speculative heathen. The apparition had unsettled his original grounds of certainty and established no new ones. . . .

The quality of this criticism is incomparable; its distinctions are of the finest. The author is a born critic, having inherited a critical tradition: he is instinctive as much as well informed. He is the scholar whom the events in books touch like those in life. But though he has outstripped his age in his power to analyse subtly, he has naturally not escaped its influence. The critics of his time were dogmatic rather than agnostic; they admired Shakespeare intensely and therefore wished at all costs to prove him consistent—like the would-be reconcilers of science and theology. Their method was to test him by their own experience of life; and Hartley Coleridge is equipped for his task with a fine impressibility. On the subject of women the balance turns against him: we do not hear the soothing, upbraiding tone which he detects in Shakespeare's treatment of Cressida and Cleopatra. A middle instance is the motive for revenge he ascribes to Hamlet—the purgatorial pangs which his father is made to suffer. It may or may not be true, it is plausible, but not proven. He is at his best in defining the psychological effect of the Ghost on Hamlet's belief. There we are with him, and against those writers who discover inconsistency. There he becomes the critic not of a generation, but of all time. Lastly, we protest against his description of Shakespeare as a 'gentleman of genius'. No doubt we all agree with Cromwell to 'honour a gentleman'; but Hartley Coleridge uses the word in a limiting manner. It were best to say that Shakespeare's nature was refined to the utmost by the practice of the highest art.

## VI

DRAKE calls Shakespeare a genius nearly universal, with a fervid and creative power of imagination. Hartley Coleridge also considers his mind to be the sphere and mirror of all humanity. While of opinion that he excelled in the philosophy of the supernatural, Drake adds that he had unrivalled intimacy with the finest feelings of our nature, and taught some of the finest lessons of humanity and wisdom, while his morality pervades all. Hartley Coleridge describes his philosophy as monarchical, and his mind as metaphysical, even theological—that he transcended nature. Also that he was a true Tory, with faith in divine purpose.

Drake gives him unsurpassed power over the picturesque force of epithet, and recognizes the profound art of his plots—while the exclusive mark of his poetry was insinuating loveliness. Skottowe dwells on his consummate judgement, also his unique use of contrast; while Hartley Coleridge says that as poet he was aristocratic, as dramatist



popular. Drake and Skottowe agree that he delighted to delineate the broad humour of inferior minds. According to Skottowe the bent of his mind was decidedly comic.

Drake says that if we dismiss the late sonnets as ideal, every other personal event in his life establishes the general moral beauty of his character, and he adds a tribute to the gentleness, benevolence, and goodness of his heart. Hartley Coleridge calls him a high-souled gentleman, with respect and reverential love of womanhood. . . .

It is obvious that the full tide of Shakespearian praise is now flowing—for himself, his art, his poetry, and his philosophy. Once more we could wish that the critics were less positive and more agnostic. They admire the work and therefore its author, and they uncritically ascribe to him the virtues of his greatest characters. No one wishes to depreciate Shakespeare the man, but it must be remembered that these confident statements about his morality and religion are unproved.

## Chapter IX

### ENGLAND 1832-1840

- I. JAMESON. II. SPALDING. III. HALLAM. IV. ARMITAGE BROWN.  
V. DE QUINCEY. VI. MAGINN. VII. COURTENAY. VIII. SPALDING.  
IX. CONCLUSION.

#### I

MRS. JAMESON<sup>1</sup> thus classifies Shakespeare's heroines: Portia, Isabella, Beatrice, Rosalind, for intellect and wit; Juliet, Helena, Perdita, Viola, Ophelia, Miranda, for passion and imagination; Hermione, Desdemona, Imogen, Cordelia, for moral sentiments and affections. Lastly she deals with the historical characters.

Though talent may predominate with women, it is less independent of the rest of the character than with man, and more modified by the sympathies and moral qualities. Portia's intellect is kindled into romance by poetic imagination, and she most unites woman's noblest and most lovable qualities. She does not keep the court in suspense for effect, but because she would rather owe Antonio's safety to anything than the legal quibble. Her speeches to Shylock are experiments on his temper and feelings, and her intellect relieves the else over-oppressive atmosphere caused by the terror and power of his character. She is equally lovable and trustful, and free from doubt and suspicion—like all women of the highest order of intellect, and though she trembles in the casket scene, hope is stronger than fear. Uncommon powers make her mind more intense; the sources of thought multiply infinitely the sources of feeling. Isabella's mind is closely allied to Portia's, yet how different the result! She has moral grandeur, vestal dignity, which make her less attractive and more imposing. We feel that she has passed under the ennobling discipline of suffering and self-denial; and when she pleads for mercy there is a depth of religious feeling and touch of melancholy, the result of long and deep meditation. She has the deeper interest of a strong undercurrent of passion and enthusiasm, betrayed rather than exhibited as the action progresses. Beatrice combines high intellect and high animal spirits; her wit is brilliant, but not imaginative, and has a touch of insolence. Less good humoured than Benedict, more impulsive than passionate, she charms more by what she is than what she says. Her airs and jests delight the more when we find her, simple as a child, falling into the snare laid for her affections. Rosalind is allied to Portia, but has not the reality of her surroundings. Her character is real, but her circumstances purely ideal and imaginative.

Juliet is love itself; she and her lover are all love surrounded by all

<sup>1</sup> *Sh.'s Heroines*, 1832.

hate, all nature amid artificial life. But the contrast is not harsh, because they are not set against a prosaic background: every circumstance, person, shade of character, tend to develop the sentiment which is the subject of the drama. Her simplicity and energy are founded in the strength of passion, not character—rising with the tide of feeling. All that Romeo and Juliet utter—their finest imagery—relates to themselves. Other love-heroines of tragedy show one or two aspects of the passion; in Juliet we see every aspect and shade of feeling. Juliet, with her parents and the Nurse, shows us all her previous education: both repressed and spoilt, she has an excuse for her conduct. She and Romeo must die; they have drunk the cup of life with its infinite joys and agonies and have nothing left to do on earth. Love is united passion and imagination: and to these Juliet owes all her qualities of mind and heart.

Helena is strong in passion and character, but more passionate than imaginative. As Isabella to Portia, so is she to Juliet: her passion is developed under its most serious aspect. The serious and energetic part of her character is founded in deep passion—passion which rests on itself without the glowing romance of Juliet's. The beauty of her character triumphs, relying as it does for all our sympathy on the truth and intensity of her affections. It is part of this wonderful beauty and its womanly truth that she does not behold Bertram with our eyes. We should look into her, not him, for the source of her love. The external interest of her character rests on the affection it inspires: in the Countess, the King, Lafeu. Perdita and Viola are distinguished by sentiment and elegance, and are more imaginative than passionate: their love is a compound of impulse and fancy. Perdita unites pastoral and romantic with classical and poetical. She is more touched with the ideal than Juliet, and has a remarkable moral elevation. Viola is less ideal, but has a touch of sentiment more profound and heart-stirring. Her character is exquisitely fitted to her part and carries her through the ordeal with all the inward and spiritual grace of modesty. Only Nature and Shakespeare could thus harmonize the utmost grace and refinement of sentiment, the broadest effects of humour, the most poignant wit, and the most indulgent benignity.

With Ophelia love is an unconscious impulse: imagination lends the external charm, not the internal power. In her the feminine character is resolved into its elementary principles—modesty, grace, tenderness. In no other Shakespearian character, except Hamlet, do we so forget the poet in his own creation. She does not know her own feelings; they are prematurely developed in their full force before she has strength to bear them: and indeed she is more conscious of being loved than of loving. She loves Hamlet not for what he is in himself, but for what he appears to her—the gentle, accomplished prince. Hamlet did love her, but after the Ghost's revelation he ranks this love among

the trivial fond records he has sworn to put away. He cannot link his terrible destiny with hers, so she finds herself entangled in a web of horrors which she is unable to comprehend. In Miranda we see the same elemental qualities expanding under genial influences to create a perfect and happy human creature. The purely natural and purely ideal blend together as nowhere else. Another of Shakespeare's women would appear coarse and artificial beside her; she is therefore placed between the demi-demon of earth and the delicate spirit of air. She resembles no earthly thing, yet is a consistent, natural human being with a distinct character—the natural result of her situation.

Hermione is an artistic miracle—a character without marked expression or vivid colour that takes captive our interest. Profound feeling is in the conception, and subdued harmony of tone in the delineation. She has much of the negative—dignity without pride, love without passion, tenderness without weakness. Out of exterior calm comes deep pathos, and the most vivid impression of life and internal power. She *will* not understand suspicions—unlike Desdemona who does not. The impression she leaves is of grandeur, without pride or coldness. Her long seclusion and failure to relent are justified by the cruel insults which she was made to suffer openly—besides the death of her son and exposure of her babe. She might mourn in solitude over her repentant husband, but his repentance could not soon efface in her strong mind the memory of his miserable weakness. Only time and religion count in a mind like hers—where strength of feeling is founded in the power of thought, and there is little impulse or imagination. Desdemona is nearest to Miranda in the perfect simplicity and unity of the delineation, but closer to realities. No two beings could be liker in character and more distinct as individuals. Both use words to express sentiment only, never reflection. The charm lies in the essence of Desdemona's character: a differently constituted woman could not have excited such intense and painful compassion without losing some of her charm. She is not weak—for only the negative is weak—and goodness and affection are a kind of power. Power of intellect or active will would have injured the dramatic effect.

Imogen is Shakespeare's most perfect individual woman: she harmonizes perfectly the most varied traits. She has tenderness, fancy, ideal grace, beauty, intellect, rank—all heightened by the conjugal character. Only her position is less fine as tragic situation than Hermione's or Desdemona's. She is extreme simplicity amid wonderful complexity. What individualizes her character is that she is a princess and a beauty, besides a tender and devoted woman, and ever superior to her position, having the dignity without the assumption of rank. Everything in Cordelia is beyond our view: we must feel rather than perceive. There are no salient points on which to seize—neither intellect, passion, nor imagination—yet enough in her for twenty

heroines. As a human being she is governed by the purest and holiest impulses and motives, the most refined from all dross of selfishness and passion—nearest perfection. We feel and acknowledge her interest throughout, but do not quite understand it. It leaves a beautiful and deep impression, but a vague one—and opinions differ about the details: proof of the internal power and wonderful depth of purpose of this character so simply treated dramatically and given such small space. It rests on the two sublimest principles of human action—love of truth and sense of duty—mingled (to prevent coldness) with woman's dearest attributes—power to feel and inspire affection. Imogen has all her qualities, but she and Cordelia are unlike. Cordelia has a natural reserve; *pudeur* in excess is her peculiar characteristic. Nothing in Shakespeare or elsewhere surpasses the scene where Lear recognizes Cordelia. The catastrophe is less awful than in *Othello*, for there is less absolute despair—and Cordelia is a saint prepared for heaven.<sup>1</sup> Yet filial piety does not individualize her; she would not have been less *herself* had she never known her father. Not what she says or does, but what she is, feels, thinks, suffers, interest us. A Madonna touches us by her maternal tenderness or sorrow—and Cordelia would be too angelic without her filial love, her wrongs, sufferings, and tears.

Miranda and Cleopatra are Shakespeare's greatest women characters: the first as poetic conception, the second as work of art—extremes of simplicity and complexity. Out of littleness comes grandeur, out of frailty power. The unsubstantial, frivolous, vain, contemptible, variable are heaped up till worthlessness is lost in magnitude, and the sublime springs out of littleness—a feat that only Shakespeare could accomplish. Cleopatra's character is the triumph of the external over the innate; she is consistently inconsistent, and cannot be reduced to an elementary principle. Perhaps vanity and love of power predominate—but the impression is perpetual contrast. Shakespeare has individualized the historical Cleopatra: her intellect, grace, wit, wiles, allurements, starts of irregular grandeur, bursts of temper, imagination, caprice, fickleness, falsehood, tenderness, truth, susceptibility to flattery, her magnificent spirit, royal pride, and gorgeous Eastern colouring. He produces the same effect as did the real woman: we are fascinated against our moral sense. She has even what we call 'constitutional good nature', which accounts for the devoted attachment of her attendants. The scene where she strikes the messenger is far from the vulgar or comic; she is privileged to 'touch the brink of all we hate' with impunity. The poetry of her character miraculously survives amid her unruly passions and childish caprices. Antony's passion is a kind of infatuation; hers in itself is true, but more complex, because no sentiment could exist undivided in her mind. Though her passion is fixed

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Bradley.

to one centre, it flutters and veers with every breath of her variable temper. Her extreme physical cowardice is so rendered as to heighten, not diminish, our respect and interest. The frail, timid, wayward woman dies heroically from the mere force of passion and will. Many plays exist on the subject, but only Shakespeare has told the truth; and he awakens sympathy for fallen grandeur without excusing guilt and error.

All the interest which Constance excites turns upon her situation as Arthur's mother, yet her individuality is distinct from her circumstances. We think of her as a mother, but we infer the rest of her character from what we see. Power is her chief attribute—of imagination, will, passion, affection, pride. She lacks moral energy and therefore self-control, but her sensibility and imagination overpower her other qualities and make her exquisitely feminine. She loves her son not only with a mother's love, but with her poetical imagination—exulting in his beauty and royal birth. Energy of passion lends the character its power; imagination dilates it into magnificence. Margaret of Anjou is not one of Shakespeare's women. He would never have shown a high-hearted woman struggling unsubdued against fortune without giving her a single personal quality. There is not an atom of poetry in her. In Katharine of Aragon Shakespeare has dispensed with youth, beauty, genius, intellect, and trusted to the moral principle alone to melt and elevate our hearts through our holiest impulses. *Truth* as a quality of the soul is the basis of the character; and in thus achieving this effect Shakespeare has given a sublime proof of his genius and wisdom.

Ambition is Lady Macbeth's ruling motive—and, to gratify it, she treads under foot every just principle and feminine feeling. Her wickedness is never disguised, and her intellect and will and nerve make her fearful: yet she remains a woman. The effect is produced by many minute and delicate touches—now by speech, now by silence. Macbeth conceives the murder, not she; she becomes the more active agent because her intellect is greater. Her indifference to blood would repel, but we feel it is produced by strong self-control. Her most savage words express sex, and place the woman before us in her dearest attributes: they soften the horror and make it more intense. Like a woman she is ambitious for her husband, not herself. She refers to his 'milkiness of nature' without scorn. Her ambition is not vulgar because her splendid imagination transfigures the object of her desire. Having gained her purpose she stops, and never incites him into new crimes. The bond of affection and confidence between them sheds a softening influence over the tragedy. Her influence as a woman equals her power over him as a superior mind. Her reproaches at the banquet scene give place to submissive silence, in which there is pathos and tenderness. It was inevitable that in such a mind conscience should wake at last. By

the most sublime judgement ever imagined, yet the most natural, the sleep of her who murdered sleep is no longer repose. Shakespeare separates good and evil, but never presents evil without suggesting the opposite good. Had she been naturally cruel she need not have solemnly abjured all pity, nor would she have died of remorse and despair. She is a stern fatalist in principle and action; her remorse is without repentance or religion, but arises from the pang of wounded conscience—horror of the past, not terror of the future. Shakespeare's blackest shadows, like Rembrandt's, exceed the darkness of Egypt, yet are transparent enough to reveal the light of heaven. . . .

Like critics already mentioned, Mrs. Jameson's faith in Shakespeare inclines to be indiscriminating, and her critical sense is dulled. She over-insists that we should see Bertram through the eyes of Helena, and Posthumus through the eyes of Imogen—and it does not occur to her that there may be little of Shakespeare in Bertram, and that his wearied mind may have left Posthumus half created. A second drawback is her analytic method, the result of which is that we see distinct individuals like Isabella and Rosalind in the same class. Qualities are abstract, but art is concrete, and the ultimate pleasure is to realize the individual. It is true that Mrs. Jameson does help us to attain this pleasure, when her preliminary analytic work is done—and it remains to distinguish her two methods. She says that Beatrice's wit is brilliant, but not imaginative, and there is much fancy in Viola's love. These are two good instances of her true and satisfying, but not thought-begetting, analysis. On the other hand, when the preliminaries are done, when Viola has been classified and analysed and compared with other heroines, there comes the penetrating remark, how exquisitely her character is fitted to her part and carries her through her ideal. So Cleopatra is dissected, and we assent, though without enthusiasm, till we are told that though her passion is fixed to one centre, it flutters and veers with every breath of her variable temper. Equally fine are her criticisms of Constance—that she loves Arthur with poetic imagination; and of Lady Macbeth—that her most savage words express sex—and also the pathos and tenderness of her silence after the banquet scene. In all these we see that knowledge has reverted to intuition and strengthened and refined it—and the intuition is specially that of a woman.

On the whole we mislike her comparisons: it helps us little to see Perdita and Viola classed together. These comparisons are of qualities, not persons: but we assent to her primal vision. Had she not truly re-created the characters she could not have told us why Portia keeps the court in suspense—or affirmed that Cordelia would still be Cordelia had she never known her father. And this power to go to the heart of her subject gives life to her work as a whole.

## II

WILLIAM SPALDING<sup>1</sup> is first concerned to separate the parts of Shakespeare and Fletcher in *The Two Noble Kinsmen*. He finds Fletcher sweet and flowing, Shakespeare stately, solemn, and passionate. Shakespeare is a mannerist, and every word of his or combination of words reveals the author at a glance. He is concise, energetic, and brief, but his merest hint shows the image was fully present with him. His conception was rapid to excess, and the result appears in his reflective passages. The contemplation of general truths stimulated his quickness of ideas—and the puny instrument of language hardly suffices him. Fletcher is diffuse, and expresses thought deliberately, and, unlike Shakespeare, is vague. Shakespeare abounds in metaphors, Fletcher rather in simile, which is the weakness of poetry: the beauty of the suggested image captivates him and he forgets the thought. The classical images in this play are characteristic of Shakespeare and his school. He piled up metaphors and images boldly and with originality, and out of a fragmentary classical outline created a new and gorgeous picture. Shakespeare's tendency to reflect is his only mental quality which he has impressed on all his characters. This play reveals it: whereas Fletcher's fund and reach of thought were small. Indeed, Shakespeare, when brief, becomes obscure, largely because his mental vision is wide. This exposed him to peculiar risks: e.g. quibbles. Unweariedly tracing the spirit of likeness through nature, he would mistake a like name for a common essence, or devise subtle and unreal distinctions. His abstract thought and burning imagination unite to personify mental powers, passions, relations. This is perceptible here, and was peculiar to Shakespeare among dramatists, though common in narrative poets.

We will not follow Spalding as he applies his precepts to the play, and assigns to either author his act or scene. He rightly says that it is hard to identify Shakespeare in plays which he only revised; but where there is but one competitor—such as Fletcher—the difference in *kind* appears. This suggests to him to repeat his former fundamental distinction: that Fletcher's intellect is barely active enough to seek the true elements of the poetical, while Shakespeare's sees these finer elements at a glance, and darts off incontinently to discover qualities poetry should not deal with. The range and opposition of Shakespeare's qualities, and their coincident operation, make him the most difficult poet to imitate. There is only one way to determine his authorship: to inquire whether the essential elements and the spirit of the whole are his. You cannot argue about it, but must meditate on the effect which the work produces on the mind. Parts of this play do touch the heart and fancy, so they are his.

<sup>1</sup> *A Letter on Sh.'s Authorship of 'The Two Noble Kinsmen', 1833.*



The origin of the work must now be dealt with, and there is ground to think that Shakespeare chose the story—though the tragi-comic underplot is not his, for he never imitated his own characters and incidents, as happens here. But in choosing his subject he belonged to an older school than Fletcher; he preferred a story which his audience knew, unlike Ben Jonson and those who came after, who invented their plots or combined different stories. Shakespeare's historical plays are the perfection of the old school. He accepted the prevailing taste, and even reproduced its mistakes and anachronisms. In its earlier stages poetry always falsifies history, and needs ignorance as an ally. Shakespeare retained the rude greatness of the older poetry, and to that school the present subject belongs. The plot is simple like Shakespeare's, and produces effect by its parts rather than mechanically perfected or complicated whole—as with Ben Jonson or Beaumont and Fletcher, or stage effect as with Massinger. Shakespeare neglects plot and concentrates on human character and passion. Note in *M.N.D.* the three frail threads of narrative from which he spins unrivalled tissues of novel thought and divine fancy. Act III of *Othello* most shows him independent of tragic situation and able to concoct dramatic power out of the most meagre elements of story. The catastrophe of wretchedness is complete when the tumult of doubt sinks into resolved and desolate conviction. The situation at the close of *Lear* is simple, but the internal convulsions are tragically moving. If Fletcher had chosen so bare a story as the *Noble Kinsmen* he would have invented new circumstances and characters.

The drama represents human character in action: and passion prompts action. In this play the simple passions—love and jealousy—reveal a greater poet than Fletcher. Like poets below the first rank, Fletcher could not preserve any one form of passion or character skillfully in the foreground. The great secret of Shakespeare's power is that he conceives clearly a definite purpose, and fixedly pursues it, and breathes beauty and emotion into the organic formation of the living statuary of the scene. Here lies his unity of purpose—in elementary conception of characters, and passions which move them. The true object of Desdemona's death scene is to exhibit Othello's mind. The expression of her anguish is arrested at the point where it would have marred the pervading spirit of the scene. Friendship is the leading idea of the *Noble Kinsmen*, and besides Palamon and Arcite there are Theseus and Perithous and Emilia and her sister. To harmonize the parts and discriminate the different shades of affection was beyond Fletcher.

The function of the poetical faculty is to perceive the poetical qualities of those objects which the imagination suggests as its materials, not to describe forms by their outside. The external world is only poetical when represented as the existing cause of mental changes.

Wordsworth transformed sensible objects into sentient existences. Where the highest poetical elements are present, imagination offers fewest images. The drama above all presents the essential qualities of poetry without foreign adjuncts. It can dispense with decoration, and presents a direct picture of life. Shakespeare most shows imagination in the force with which he conceives Richard, Macbeth, Lear, Hamlet. Ben Jonson and others show one oblique, partial aspect of character: they present the passions, but not the control which the calmer principles of our nature exert. Ben Jonson's characters are individuals or portraits: they do not suggest universal relations and hidden causes. Shakespeare's understanding controlled his fancy and passions, and his characters have a quiet good sense unusual in poetry. Apart from the fact that his sobriety increased the effect of his passionate scenes, it helped his higher purpose: to show general truth while keeping to acknowledged principles. He relates facts to the system of universal nature, and while giving facts hints at causes. His characters are never monsters of evil, and he shows passions conflicting with reason, not only with each other. His guiding principle is selection of the intellectual and reflective in character; some of his characters only meditate, viz. Jaques, who is like the ancient chorus. He is no misanthrope, though he may be sarcastic—the sarcasm of one who contrasts reality with imagination. *Timon* is softened by tenderness and good feeling; and *T. and C.* is his one bitter play. His thoughtfulness is a moral distinction, apparent in the *Kinsmen*, while we might read through Fletcher without discovering that man has a higher principle than his earthly nature. Shakespeare is of the world, and his morality may not be the loftiest, but he has the solemn moral feeling of all great minds. Evil is always evil, though it may prevail, and the moral rule is always acknowledged as binding. He has bared man's soul, and added an impressive element of truth to his portrait from outer nature. His scrutiny of moral infirmity was unflinching, and he feared to represent the better principle as victorious. He saw Macbeth's goodness turned to venom by an embodied fiend—Othello's gentleness light the fires of his evil passions. This view of life most guides the mind to moral truth. . . .

Spalding has a clear conception of poetry and the drama, and is no blind follower of Shakespeare. He admits that some of Shakespeare's distinctions are unreal, and also that his morality may not have been of the loftiest. In the comparison of the two dramatists Fletcher suffers, and no one will wish to contradict; and it is an excellent point that to determine Shakespeare's authorship one must meditate on the effect which the whole work produces on the mind. And yet some years later the same critic admits that he is less certain whether Shakespeare took part in the *Noble Kinsmen*. Thereby he reveals the weakness of the present treatise: its author's learning overbears his instinct. It is only when we touch the higher problems that we discover this fault;

and therefore Spalding's achievement is still great, though not the greatest. If on the whole the abstract rather predominates, he at least brings home to us that only Shakespeare mastered the hard business of play-writing, the needs of which are not mechanical plot-making, but knowledge of the fundamentals of human nature. Something of the elemental force of Shakespeare's mind, that the construction of a great play requires, comes to us from Spalding's pages.

### III

HENRY HALLAM<sup>1</sup> welcomes *Verona* because the characters are both ideal and true, and though he does not rank it above the third class, he sees retrospectively that its author promised to eclipse Greene and Marlowe. However, he feels the full impact of Shakespeare's genius in *M.N.D.*, which seems to him his most perfect work. He is first overwhelmed with the imaginative poetry, and then recognizes the effortless skill with which Shakespeare had wrought three or four actions into a plot of such a complex kind that no previous dramatist had attempted. The fairy machinery is altogether original, and one of the most beautiful conceptions in the world—more so because it was blended with 'human mortals'. Shakespeare's idiom, first apparent in *Verona*, becomes more pronounced. *R. and J.* is an early work, lacking Shakespeare's thoughtful philosophy and abounding in conceits: the most open to reasonable censure of the plays, though pervaded by the charm of deep melancholy from the contrast of early delirious joy and final horror. Juliet is not among the great women characters, and indeed is one degree more mad than Romeo, whose tone is that of the most bombastic commonplace of gallantry. False thoughts and misplaced phrases deform the whole of Act III; and perhaps the Nurse points the obvious moral against the bad influence of such domestics.

The second period, which includes the histories and the riper comedies, shows stronger marked characters and deeper insight: viz. the two Richards, Shylock, Falstaff, Hotspur. In the *Merchant* a complex plot is managed as never before or since. The language begins to show metaphysical obscurity: his sweet and sportive temper, though it never left him, is yielding to serious thought. Indeed, here, in *A.Y.L.* and some histories, the philosophic eye is turned inward on the mysteries of human nature. But no other play so gives the bright imagination and fascinating grace of Shakespeare's youth with the thoughtfulness of maturer age.

*Twelfth-Night* has beautiful passages and Malvolio's humorous absurdity, but lacks the wit and spirit of *M. Ado* and is less well constructed. Viola would interest more had she not unfairly and indelicately determined to win the Duke's heart before she had seen him;

<sup>1</sup> *Introduction to Literature of Europe in 15th, 16th, and 17th Centuries*, 1837-9.

and Sebastian's part is improbable without the redeeming comic effect of the *Errors*. The *Wives* best displays English manners—and Shakespeare never produced more diverse characters. We get English gentlemen, though caricatured—Slender being a satire on the brilliant youth of the provinces. Anne Page is a fairly common type; under a garb of placid and decorous mediocrity she is able to pursue her own will. If Falstaff loses something, it is because he is so humiliated that he cannot carry things off. After the great tragedies we see Shakespeare struggling with the overmastering power of his own mind most in *M. for M.* His characters step aside from the dramatic path to utter their creator's deep, subtle, and curious thoughts. He improves his subject by suppressing the sacrifice of chastity, and thus gains a splendid exhibition of character. The Mariana episode is skilful—but it is not explained how the Duke had known her secret yet continued to trust Angelo. The comic parts are worth little, but the play makes a great dramatic effect because the spectator knows the stratagems which have deceived Angelo, and spares his indignation. *Lear* is the most wonderful of dramatic conceptions, of highest ideal character, yet idealized from the reality of nature. Only what follows seems able to redeem the *Lear* of the first act—and his intellectual energies grow stronger in calamity. *Timon* is the same—generous more from ostentation than love of others—and it would have been better had he and *Lear* known that philosophy of human nature in their calmer moments. There was a period when Shakespeare was ill at ease—when he conceived the censurer of mankind: Jaques and the Duke, then Hamlet, *Lear*, *Timon*. The moral speculation of the later plays is not of this type.

*Macbeth* is the great epic drama, Shakespeare's best play. *J.C.* has fine scenes and passages; the characters are individuals in the Shakespearean sense; and Antony's speech the most perfect ancient or modern example of the orator's art. The type of Cleopatra is the courtesan of common life: but the resemblance is that of Michael Angelo's Sibyls to a muscular woman. *Coriolanus* has the grandeur of sculpture, and his proportions are colossal. Shakespeare made his arrogance dramatically possible by abasing the plebeians. The Roman citizens are calumniated—but unity of emotion is not dissipated by contradictory energies. Shakespeare did not treat Roman affairs with exact scholarship, but the grandeur of sentiments and language proves that he had imbibed the true spirit.

Shakespeare has surpassed all in creative power, in strength, and variety of imagination. All his characters are individuals—distinct types of life in well-defined differences. He embodied neither abstract qualities nor definite condition of manners, nor drew much from living models. His philosophy, his intimate searching out of the human heart, is his own peculiar gift. . . .

Hallam is apt to be literal and unimaginative, except with *M.N.D.*,

and to praise plays or passages because they are realistic, or help the action apart from character. Thus he overpraises Antony's oration, and takes Coriolanus at his own valuation and that of those who have witnessed his deeds of arms. Want of romance and humour hinder him from appreciating *R. and J.* and *Twelfth-Night*; and yet, because his eyes are undazzled, he perceives some true faults in *R. and J.* This applies also to the comic parts of *M. for M.*, which are now questioned as authentic; and the fault of the Duke's previous knowledge of Mariana is also a permanent one. A realistic play like the *Wives* would naturally draw forth his best criticism—on the characters of Slender and Anne Page—though he betrays incidentally that he had mistaken the true Falstaff. The critic who lacks imagination will at times mistake his opinions as an individual for universal truth. We see this in his censure of the Nurse (*R. and J.*); yet the suggestive nature of his judgement on *Lear*—that it needed such calamities to redeem the *Lear* of the first act—is due to this personal quality. It was also the best kind of literal criticism that Shakespeare at one period became the censurer of mankind. At the present day we are more chary of personal interpretation: but it was a necessary stage of evolution.

#### IV

THE theories of Charles Armitage Brown<sup>1</sup> on the Sonnets do not concern us, but rather his dissertation on Shakespeare's knowledge and his remarks on the plays. Genius is not knowledge, but the power to acquire it. A man of genius must add the world's experience to his own, and Shakespeare nobly cultivated his genius. If imagination be not founded on reality, it is the dream of a madman. The more imaginative the work, the more knowledge is needed: the Weird Sisters surpass Macbeth. They have all the evil that is in ourselves and also superhuman power. They utter words which, from others, would excite not the horror they do, but laughter. More general knowledge was required, nicer metaphysical distinctions, deeper insight into the feelings of spectators, to represent these earthly yet unearthly agents, just within the verge of disgusting abhorrence, never to offend, but to delight, than to create Macbeth. Shakespeare's mind was too rich to need the grafting from a foreign stock. He imitated no one, but merely read to gain information. Knowledge rests on observation, experience, power to profit by them. In this sense Shakespeare is the wisest man as well as the greatest poet—and it injures his character to say that he owed all to nature. He perfected himself by slow gradations, practice, and laborious study. His characters are individuals, yet all speak the poet's own golden language. He is master of their hearts, their hidden springs of action, and their varied mode of expression.

<sup>1</sup> *Sh.'s Autobiographical Poems*, 1838.

Intuition is limited to instinct, and we therefore ascribe his power to immense acquired knowledge of mankind and profound study of his art—aided by his genius.

In historical plays, whether English or Roman, Shakespeare closely followed authority. When he adopted a tale he altered as it pleased him, and built characters, such as Othello and Shylock, on a mere hint. His heroes are not the aloof and exalted beings of Addison and Racine; they have our own wants and passions, petty griefs, and deep-rooted sorrows. Othello complains of a headache, and Duncan sleeps on a bed with sheets and blankets, not on a stately couch. The conveniences of life are mingled with deeds of death, and our imagination is enthralled. Shakespeare loved ardently all created things, and a poet's first need is universal kindliness. Putting aside the refuted story of deer-stealing, we know nothing against his honesty, modest bearing, harmless mirth, brilliant wit, and 'gentleness'. He was naturally pious, and Sonnet 146 proves his faith in immortality.

In *Verona* the presumptive goodness of Proteus is founded on his not having committed evil. His love is corporeal: like an idolater he must have his deity continually before him or his adoration ceases. He is only penitent when all his schemes are overthrown, when his disgrace is so overwhelming that nothing can avail but absolute contrition. Shakespeare's morality is less in his fables than his characters; the good incite to virtue and the erring dissuade from vice. He shows Romeo and Juliet as worthy to be envied, not pitied. We share their transport and would undergo ten times as much to love and be loved with such purity. Their brief joy surpasses the long life of the common mortal; it would insult our imaginations to suppose them married and living happy ever after. *L.L.L.* is satirical, yet the entire feeling is good humour. Biron's strain of eloquence at the close of the fourth act eclipses anything in Shakespeare. *All's Well* is intolerable if we cannot reconcile ourselves to Bertram and perceive among his errors the germs of a good and honourable mind. He has a good heart, but his haughtiness of rank threatens to dull the edge of the kinder passions and cloud the intellect. He wins fame in the wars and so discovers there is something better than hereditary honour; and in the end he admits Helen's love above the court-bred smiles of a princess. His faults are venial, and because he cared for Diana's good name, not his own, he forged the story of the ring thrown from a casement. The mistakes of the *Errors* are ludicrous, the action serious. There is the irresistible contrast of the actors' grave astonishment with their laughable situations in the eyes of the spectators who know the secret. Shylock extorts some of our involuntary good will, and pity in defeat, because he is constant to his creed. He is never treated with a show of respect till he is feared—and we only recoil at his appalling vengeance. Both stories—caskets and bond—are hard to believe, but one tempts us to accept

the other. We are placed among strange events, and our pleasurable wonder is untouched by common life. In *T. and C.* the military character is displayed—the different kinds of soldier. They have no excitement beyond their profession, and the love and comic scenes rather hinder the main design. The disappointment of Troilus is but an episode, because the other characters are too powerful, though without a leading interest. Shakespeare's contempt for a mob in *Coriolanus* is a trifle compared to his earnest inculcation of the doctrine that knowledge is power; and no other poet had unceremoniously placed royalty on a level with humanity, and openly exclaimed against every species of corruption. . . .

Armitage Brown is a whole-hearted panegyrist of Shakespeare, and he is no believer in the modern 'aesthetic man'. According to him the first requisite for the art of poetry is universal kindness, and the basis of Shakespeare's inspiration would be his moral wisdom and 'gentleness' as much as his creative power. In this he is typical of his age, and it leads him into wrong roads—as when he exalts Biron's speech (*L. L. L.*), or defends Bertram (*All's Well*). However, it nerves him to vindicate Shylock, and to suggest something of the passion of *R. and J.*, that made the rest of life look dim. But his best work is to make us grasp the realistic-romantic nature of Shakespeare's heroes. Shakespeare relied in no way on what is aloof, or sublime, in the ordinary sense, but transfigured the world that lay before him. Othello complains of a headache and Duncan sleeps in an ordinary bed. These men who share our earthly life and yet are far removed bring home to us the force and strangeness of Shakespeare's creative power.

## V

DE QUINCEY begins his article on Shakespeare<sup>1</sup> by refuting the charge that he was neglected in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, though his genius may have been too colossal for Addison's feeble poetic faculty; and Milton, wrapped in puritanic and classic prejudices, may have closed his mind against full impressions. Shakespeare has extended the domains of human consciousness and pushed its dark frontiers into regions never even suspected. The possible beauty of the female character had not been seen as in a dream before Shakespeare called into perfect life the radiant shapes of Desdemona, Imogen, Hermione, Perdita, Ophelia, Miranda, and many others. We respect but do not love Antigone and Electra: like all antique characters they put forward one single trait of character, as an abstraction—whereas Shakespeare gives all in the concrete. His is the complex system where all the elements act and react upon each other, even by and through each other, like real *organic* life. The Greek tragic woman was seen

<sup>1</sup> 1838.

under circumstances so dreadful as to abolish the effect of sexual distinction. Shakespeare's women had the appropriate beauty of female character, and were emancipated and exalted under a new law of Christian morality. On the Greek stage man was the puppet of Fate, and could not display a character—which proceeds from the will. A fiftieth part of the profound analysis applied to Hamlet, Falstaff, Othello would have interrupted the blind agencies of Fate to the Greeks. Shakespeare, the absolute creator of female character, was but the mightiest of all painters of male: because history gives us powerful delineations of its chief agents—men. Thus he expands the germ of the historical Antony, but Cleopatra is a pure creation of art.

The supernatural world—the awful projection of the human conscience—also belongs to the Christian mind. In *M.N.D.*, as nowhere else, the circumstantial proprieties of fairy life are exquisitely imagined. In the Ghost of *Hamlet* we see the *positive* of Shakespeare's power, in the witches of *Macbeth* the negative. At a time when, through popular superstition, such creatures had become degraded, Shakespeare does not fear to employ, in his greatest tragedy for scenical grandeur, three old women to produce the same effect as the Eumenides of Aeschylus.

Moreover, his works yield a golden bead-roll of thoughts, deepest, subtlest, most pathetic, most catholic—most characteristic of the particular person, yet suited to every human being. His dialogue, compared to the set speeches of the French drama, is such as takes place in real life. . . .

De Quincey's article commands attention, because, like all his writing, it is beautifully phrased. However, we must dispute one or two points—and the first is Shakespeare's treatment of women. We think that he expends too much force in proving them to be more complex than classical heroines; and we thus gather that the subject, initiated by Mrs. Jameson, was in its beginning. Next, Shakespeare did far more than expand the germ of the historical Antony; and we doubt if the statement that the women characters excel the men will be re-echoed. But if this detracts from Shakespeare's creative power, he makes amends by his remarks on the supernatural—that in *Macbeth* Shakespeare achieved by means of three old women an equally appalling effect as Aeschylus with the Eumenides. Like the point of Armitage Brown, recently noticed, it makes more mysterious the origins of the creative power.

## VI

WILLIAM MAGINN'S<sup>1</sup> first paper is on Falstaff, and he considers the Prince was the butt of the Knight. After Gadshill the Prince tries a jest, but it breaks down, and Falstaff victoriously orders sack and

<sup>1</sup> *Sh. Papers*, 1838-9.



merriment with an accent of command. It is a still deeper tribute when, for reasons of State, he has to renounce the companion who had misled him: for if the old master-spirit be allowed one moment's ground of vantage, the good resolutions would be dissipated into thin air. Quickly, whom he had robbed and cheated for twenty-nine years, hovers anxiously over his dying bed. The players succumbed to the temptation of representing him on the stage as a mere buffoon; but Shakespeare ignored copy-book ethics and knew that Falstaffs are not as plentiful as blackberries. The moral is that great powers of wit will fascinate, whether or not they be joined to solid qualities. It is foolish to dispute about Falstaff's cowardice: he was no fit antagonist for Douglas. It is never whispered that he is not ready to perform the duties of a soldier. He never bullies the weak, or is obsequious, or supercilious to common men. That jesting companions have been attached to him for years frees him from all suspicion of malignity. The solution of his character is that, conscious of unusual powers, he finds himself outstripped in the race. He and Shallow began the world together—and now the starveling justice has land and beeves, while he, the wit and gentleman, is penniless and living from hand to mouth. He is no glutton, he owns to sack and sugar, but is never accused of indulging in the grosser pleasures of the table. Capon is light eating, and he speaks of wine, never of food. He is never represented drunk,<sup>1</sup> and sack does not cloud his intellect. He is absolutely distinct from Sir Toby; he never plays practical jokes, never brawls, and hates disturbance. He never laughs, but jests with a sad brow, and his wit is from the head, not the heart—satirical, not joyous. He does not show his feelings—that he is misplaced—but slight indications reveal them. The true art is not to label a character, but to let attendant circumstances reveal it. He lives in the world alone and apart, as regards true community of thought with others, and his main business is to get through the day.

Jaques is an idle gentleman given to musing; his invectives are remarkable for fine expression rather than pungent satire. The man who could thus describe the seven ages has seen little to complain of. The schoolboy grieves because he must go to school; the lover endures no bitter pangs; all the characters are well cared for. True melancholy can dwell on no one description. Abate unavoidable misfortunes and Jaques's catalogue is one of happy conditions. There is no trace of the child doomed to wretchedness before its birth. We see the gallant confronting the cannon, but not the horrors and sufferings of war. Shakespeare never intended Jaques to be anything but a maker of fine sentences. His lament over the deer is a peg on which to hang conceits: he laments over the deer, but eats venison. The iron has not entered into his soul.

<sup>1</sup> Hazlitt, and other critics, have made similar remarks.

Romeo is an unlucky man: e.g. his ill-omened interference slays his friend Mercutio. He is as unlucky in his self-chosen mode of death as in everything else. He must make it instantaneous—whereas had he been in less of a hurry he might have lived. Haste—parent and child of misfortune—is his characteristic. As Romeo, the gentleman, is the unlucky man, so Bottom, the blockhead, is the lucky man. He would play every part, but the player's triumphs are evanescent. Shakespeare's own rank as an actor was not high, and his reflections on the business are usually splenetic. Aware how transitory is his fame, the player seeks to grasp as much as he can while he has the power. Theseus would have bent in reverent awe before Titania: but Bottom never thinks there is anything extraordinary in her passion for him, and he is afterwards unaffected by the event.

Timon's is no mock hatred, but derives from the same source as that of Lear or Constance or Margaret. Not to be generous is not to be himself: but the loss of his wealth does not impress him deeply. If others had the pleasure of receiving, he had the glory of giving—and neither party had the right to complain. He had led the kind of life to drive away all who were capable of inspiring respect and friendship. He consulted his own whim in giving, and made no sacrifice. In prosperity he cherished chance companions, and in adversity curses all mankind with equal want of consideration. With the fourth act Shakespeare's Timon begins and ends: it gives the poetry of misanthropy. Timon's is absolute madness, and as such can only become poetical, instead of contemptible. Like others he had valued money and money's worth above human affection. He had never shown any kind of love for women, and after his misfortunes he curses the whole female sex. Because he had worshipped gold he thinks it will subvert women's honour as well as men's faith. He patronizes to the end, and declines the gold of Alcibiades because he wishes to show that *he* has more gold. Insanity, arising from pride, is the key of his whole character.

Polonius is only ridiculous in his courtier character, and because court etiquette has cramped his nature. A man whom his children love cannot be contemptible; the stage buffoon could not have inspired the feelings which his children exhibit. His death would not have roused Laertes to fury and made him justify murder, or driven Ophelia mad.

Shakespeare's characters are real men and women: angels and devils do not exist in the world. People do not act wickedly because they love wickedness, but from an incentive—as when they act nobly from ambition, love of adventure, passion, necessity. Virtue borders upon vice; we must not look only at the action, but find a motive. Shakespeare's characters can always be treated as existing people—and each has a redeeming point. Iago is his sole exemplar of personal revenge: for even in Shylock the passion is hardly personal. Iago, superseded by

Cassio who has no great skill in arms, is hurt in his tenderest part. It was one of the world's old grievances—and an Italian would not be restrained by the principles of an Englishman. At that very moment he sees his chance in Othello's ill-mated marriage. He proceeds against him rather to show his talents, and is then hurried resistlessly forward by the current of deceit and iniquity. He could not help committing his crimes; he could not have calculated on the harvest which sprang from his seed of suspicion. He himself had reasons for jealousy—and the offence seemed trivial. It therefore never occurred to him that to accuse Desdemona of a like offence would arouse in Othello such a tempest of fury.

The gradations of an author's genius may be estimated by his manner of treating women. The highest genius always speaks of women with a deep feeling of reverential delicacy. There is no licentious feeling or female frailty, except Cressida, in Shakespeare; his heroes woo honourably; even Goneril and Regan intend marriage; and poetry does everything to make us forget Cleopatra's faults. Shakespeare makes his women do all their duties faithfully, and surrounds them with love. Woman appears in his pages as if she were the cherished daughter of a fond father, the idolized mistress of an adoring lover, the goddess of a kneeling worshipper. Thus, Lady Macbeth is human in heart and impulse.

*Macbeth* is the gloomiest of the plays; in every act we have blood in torrents, and ruin, murder, horrible doubts, unnatural suspicions, portents of dread in earth and heaven. The play is one clot of blood from beginning to end. We feel as little interest in the gracious Duncan, in Banquo, in Lady Macduff, as in the slaughtered grooms. Except the two actors, the characters are nonentities. Macbeth was always a man of blood, and had designed the murder as soon as he met the witches. Her guiding passion was love for him; she sees he covets the throne and plays her part. He has no feeling for sin or pity for his victim; he fears loss of the world's good opinion, or the consequences of failure. She knew there were no scruples to overcome, so applied herself to show that the present was the most favourable time. She has unsexed herself for him, she works for his ambition, and provides for his safety. He shows no pity or feeling for anybody but himself, and is only haunted by fear of detection. Does she really think, 'A little water'? She shall tell us from her sleep how dreadful was the struggle she had to subdue. Her nerve was unbroken during the night of murder, but horror was already seated in her heart. In later days fright and astonishment succeed, and she addresses him in the humbled tone of an inferior. She was no fiend, she was punished for her one crime by a life of disaster and remorse—and she was not Macbeth's tempter. There were no such beings as the Weird Sisters: the voice that told him he should be king was that of his own ambition. He only believed as much of the

prediction as he wished, and tried to defeat the rest.<sup>1</sup> They are but the personified suggestions of his mind. Her sin is that she sacrifices all for him. That he, who is selfish in ambition and selfish in fear, never ceases to love her is his one merit. Had she been less strong he would not have confided to her his ambitious designs. Less sensitive, she would not have suffered the crime to prey for ever like a vulture on her heart. She is another instance of the ruin that all-sacrificing love will bring to women. . . .

Maginn has flashes of insight into character, but is less happy in dealing with a character's reactions. His inspiration is momentary, but the moment is a precious one. Perhaps no one has said better things about Falstaff himself: his statement that disputes about Falstaff's courage are foolish, and that he was no fit antagonist for Douglas, is on a level with Maurice Morgann. But he does not convince when he says that Falstaff was conscious of his wasted life, that he jests with a sad brow, and his wit is from the head, not the heart. Falstaff is called the most humorous character in literature: and the reason is the contrast between his method of life and advanced years. It is for the reader to do the conscious thinking, and play Sancho Panza to this Don Quixote. On Jaques Maginn is entirely excellent, and although the theory of the 'four periods' is a questionable one, his words incidentally divide the creator of the reflective characters of comedy and tragedy. Nor, despite some excellent modern criticism,<sup>2</sup> have two better points been made about Bottom—that he was the lucky man, and that he was afterwards unaffected by the memory of Titania.

Maginn's first moment is good, but he is less happy in following out the train of thought. In the seven ages the picture of the schoolboy satisfies the reader: he need not be told that the schoolboy grieves because he must go to school—or that all the characters are well cared for. We feel the same about Falstaff's 'sad brow'—the fact that even Goneril and Regan intend marriage—and Lady Macbeth's 'humbled tone of an inferior'. While imagination upholds Maginn he speaks well, but when it fails he sinks down to prose. Perhaps it serves him longest with Lady Macbeth.

## VII

THOMAS PEREGRINE COURTENAY<sup>3</sup> inquires into Shakespeare's authorities for his history, how far he departed from them, and whether the plays are 'properly historical'. He finds *John* inaccurate, and asks why Shakespeare omitted the Great Charter. Was it because he was a courtier, or because the old play had omitted it? Hotspur is Shakespeare's own creation: the historical Hotspur is simply a gallant

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Skottowe.

<sup>2</sup> See Priestley (1925).

<sup>3</sup> *Commentaries on the Historical Plays of Sh.*, 1840.

soldier and able commander. The crown scene is Shakespeare's, and so is the banishing of Falstaff. He finds Queen Margaret in *Henry VI* typically Shakespearian, and with equal right to be deemed heroic and greater personal qualities than Lady Macbeth, though he admits the character of the latter is more poetical. His final review of the English historical plays is that Shakespeare used little artifice and design in constructing characters, but dramatized incidents and speeches and left characters to be inferred.

He formed Lady Macbeth's character on a slight hint from Holinshed—and the sleep-walking scene is a beautiful fiction. She shows some womanly feeling, but does not excite our sympathy. It would diminish Shakespeare's work to make such wickedness tolerable. Next to *Othello* it is the finest play on the stage, but inferior to some others to read, through lack of splendid speeches. *Coriolanus* shows Shakespeare an ultra-Tory; and the hero is a great criminal, though his criminality is covered by his magnificence. In the quarrel between Brutus and Cassius some speeches are almost copied from Plutarch; but Shakespeare has added some touches which heighten the interest and feeling, and are not inconsistent with the historical characters. *A. and C.* would be attractive on the stage, but lacks the force and dignity of versification of many other plays.

Shakespeare was probably an idle man who did not make full use of his great powers of observation, imagination, invention, understanding. He was satisfied to gain popularity and profit by converting the works of others. He could make an excellent play out of a worthless one, but took little pains except with the language and verse. He seldom reconstructed plot or character, and so did not correct, in former writers or historians or translators, the lack of consistency or unity as much needed for moral as for dramatic effect. Coleridge's belief that Shakespeare's genius was superhuman is absurd and blasphemous. His characters are natural, and show philosophical knowledge of the human mind: but character-drawing is no longer an uncommon gift. Novelists like Austen and Scott excel Shakespeare in accurate, varied, contrasted, and curiously shaded discrimination of human character. Johnson calls Shakespeare's characters 'species', Pope, 'individual'. Johnson means that each is justified by a numerous class in real life: Pope, that each may clearly be distinguished from the others. . . .

Courtenay is not a critic to be taken seriously, as these selected judgments prove. In his day the man without imagination might still concern himself with the highest aesthetic themes. We can test him by referring to his remarks on Lady Macbeth and *A. and C.* When he calls a passage poetical he probably means that it is expressed in ornamental or well-chosen words. That he had no idea of Shakespeare's true greatness we see from his comparison of Shakespeare's characters with those of modern novelists. Art for him meant artifice—and the

best play or novel the most ingenious. But he is included here because, like Skottowe, he has examined Shakespeare's authorities and brought to light those passages which were Shakespeare's own and those suggested by history. Also he has stumbled, in the critical darkness of a century ago, against some difficulties for which modern thought has provided an external solution. Shakespeare's psychology was unerring, yet it is true, as Courtenay says, that there are some inconsistent characters—as if he had not drawn the whole character in his mind.

## VIII

IN an article on 'Recent Shakespearean Literature'<sup>1</sup> Spalding asserts that since the beginning of the nineteenth century Shakespeare's fame has risen to the heights of idolatry. The growth of an inquiring temper and true philosophical spirit, which seeks to gain the proper point of view for contemplating a literary monument as a whole, instead of poring microscopically over the details of parts, has silenced those who blamed him for lack of taste and judgement and chance excellence. It were strange if one who produced the sweetest poetry, who sustained emotion at its utmost height through whole scenes, who excelled in the dramatic faculty of comprehending and representing character in all its varieties, should lose his powers of mind in constructing the works where his characters find their field of action. He is now admitted to be a consummate artist, and the only fault for which he is blamed is conceits and plays on words.

Spalding divides Shakespeare's career into three stages. The first was that of his early manhood which ended about 1593. The second lasted to 1600, and the third to his period of retirement. The first period was imperfect from inexperience and technical unskilfulness. The characters of *Verona* are hazy, and the whole leaves an impression of moral dissatisfaction. Yet the characters are drawn from social life at once ideal and true. He only fails because his power of dramatic generalization is imperfectly developed. *L.L.L.* is less ambitious, and shows how genius learns by its own failures. His middle stage shows that he saw clearly that aspect of the relation of things in which lies the essence of genuine comedy. *M.N.D.* is a dream such as only one poet dreamt. Four incongruous groups of characters are harmonized to the mind's eye as completely as the wildest apparitions in the fancy of the sleeper. Where did such groups ever encounter and act upon each other, except in the young dreamer's brain? *A.Y.L.* shows a remarkable union of opposite qualities. Though nature sheds on all a common light and joy, life presents for each group an aspect coloured by personal character and circumstances. For Orlando and Rosalind

<sup>1</sup> *Edinburgh Review* (July 1840).

earth is a fancifully romantic scene—for Touchstone a theatre. The peasants borrow in turn romance from Rosalind or folly from the Clown. Both in this play and the *Merchant*, ideal and real, universal and particular, are perfectly blended and balanced. In the latter, poetical fancy wedded to the charm of love disguises the story of the caskets; while that of the pound of flesh is ennobled at once by variety and truth of character, strokes of passion, and temperate judgement. Act V relieves the heart from the oppression of the judgement scene: the latter does not affect like genuine comedy which should show man's relations to higher powers, and make his weakness the fountain of happiness and reconciliation. *M. Ado* differs in admitting us behind the curtain throughout the whole series of deceits and mistakes. The incidents are externally tragic, but the whole rests within that sphere where comedy finds its nurture.

The five great tragedies display a world of thoughts, feelings, and images to which nothing in ancient or modern literature can compare. In *R. and J.*, *Lear*, *Othello* passion is the leading impulse, and death the end of all. In the first two we feel at once it must be so, but in *Othello* there is no visible canker, and an intruding fiend is needed. In *Macbeth* and *Hamlet* the grasp of life is wider: the human will is the principle of action, as source of desires and affections. Both plays show the will powerless to gain the ends desired by passion, and the catastrophe of both is one of absolute destruction to the individuals. In *Macbeth* conscience insufficiently directs the will; in *Hamlet* weak will is the key to all mysteries. Both plays touch the supernatural—absolutely evil in *Macbeth*; while the apparition of *Hamlet* is neither earthly nor malevolent, only revealing itself as the instrument of a purpose, while the affections of earth cling about it in harrowing union with the unutterable experiences of the tomb. The tempestuous action of *Macbeth*, prompted in every step by unholy alliance of guilty human will with demoniac agency, contrasts with the series of accidents in *Hamlet* which show the impotence of human plays and passions. Hamlet's resolutions produce either no action or other than he wished: and it is the same with the lesser characters, according to Shakespeare's beautiful parallelism. The accession of Fortinbras to Hamlet's throne is like the judicial punishments in Greek drama when princely houses stained with unnatural crime are annihilated. That enigma of life is indeed awful which action but perplexes more and thought makes darker, and the only solution of which is death, and uncertain revelations from the world beyond. In *Macbeth* punishment follows guilt, and heaven's decree guides all for ultimate good through mysterious ways, as in real life. *Othello* has much of Greek fate—irresistible, irresponsible power that destroys men. Alone of Shakespeare's plays it leaves a hopeless weight on the heart. Desdemona's fate does not cause this, but Othello's suicide: he is Shakespeare's only Christian

hero to die by his own hand: and even his suicide is less harrowing than his preceding prostration of soul. Nothing seems to justify the horror morally, and we must seek explanation in Othello's character. The shock annihilates within him everything that once made him strong and lofty. . . .

Spalding's mind has progressed in the seven years since his first work, of which we complained that learning overbore instinct. He still wishes to explain the great tragedies, and the line in his mind between moral and aesthetic is strongly marked. He notes with satisfaction that in *Macbeth* punishment follows guilt—but he does feel that there is much, especially in *Hamlet* and *Othello*, that transcends explanation, and he states the difficulty forcibly. Also, by emphasizing the incongruous nature of the events and characters which Shakespeare fused, he helps us to realize how complex was his art.

## IX

AS we return upon our steps we first notice the remarks on Shakespeare's women. Mrs. Jameson says that he has discovered that women have by nature virtues that are merciful. De Quincey calls him the absolute creator of female character. Maginn affirms that no writer created so many female characters or more appreciated female excellence.

The following are remarks on his historical method: by Mrs. Jameson, that he was true to the spirit and letter of history—or if he departed from the letter it was due to a higher beauty or more universal truth; by Spalding, that after 1600 few writers but he touched historical drama; by Hallam, that he followed history very exactly, and this greatly increased his popularity; by Brown, that he dramatized history as if writing on oath.

The opinions on his artistic power may all be ultimately reconciled with the belief that he was the supreme artist. Spalding speaks of his loose construction, but also of his unity of impulse; and in his later essay allows him intelligent and self-conscious design. Mrs. Jameson, commenting on the ancient belief that strength and virtue were one, remarks that this sublime principle of art was revealed to Shakespeare. Hallam says that he was the first to attempt a complex plot; Maginn, that in everything material, possession of genius means possession of art; Brown, that his art was equal to his wisdom.

His characters are recognized beyond all question as individuals: according to Mrs. Jameson, Shakespeare and nature show us what the human being *is*; and she instances the psychology of Polonius as distinct to Shakespeare: we see what is in his mind, though he is not conscious of it. Brown says that even the minutest touches in his characters more and more reveal the individual—and that only Shake-



speare makes them describe themselves without effort; and Maginn, that his characters are real men and women, not abstractions.

Some important comments are made on his philosophy: Spalding's, that the tendency to reflect is his only quality which he has impressed on all his characters, and his writings contain a mass of general truths. When he says that in spite of solemn moral feeling his morality may not be of the loftiest, we must bear in mind his later remark, that poetic justice was alien to Shakespeare's far-reaching speculations. However, we must also bear in mind that Mrs. Jameson called Lady Macbeth's sleep-walking the sublimest judgement ever recorded on her who murdered sleep. From this we glance at De Quincey—that Shakespeare has extended the domains of human consciousness. Hallam says that, after *R. and J.*, thoughtful philosophy prevailed in Shakespeare, and agrees with Spalding that his philosophy was his own peculiar gift. Brown calls him a deeply philosophic poet with an immense acquired knowledge of mankind, and says that his morality is more in his characters than his plot. Spalding and Hallam speak of his obscurity: the one derives it from brevity, the other from obsolescence. With an eye on modern critics, we include Mrs. Jameson's remark that Shakespeare had not two manners—and Margaret of Anjou lacked family likeness to his women. . . .

We note, in the above, advance over earlier groups in appreciating Shakespeare's power to draw the characters of women—and also growing consciousness of the nature of his creative power in the insistence that his characters are real men and women, though produced by imagination, not observation. Courtenay is the exception to what is becoming the rule, that the would-be interpreter of Shakespeare must use his imagination. Complaints about the unities diminish: a proof that his art is recognized to be more complex than the classic, and to require the widest basis in life.

FRANCE 1800-1845

- I. STAËL. II. CHATEAUBRIAND. III. STAËL. IV. LEMERCIER. V. GEOF-  
FROY. VI. STENDHAL. VII. HUGO. VIII. MAGNIN. IX. DUPORT.  
X. DESCHAMPS. XI. VIGNY. XII. VILLEMALIN. XIII. BARANTE.  
XIV. SAINT-MARC GIRARDIN. XV. CONCLUSION.

I

MADAME DE STAËL<sup>1</sup> says that the French may blame Northern literature for lack of taste, but taste never requires the sacrifice of genius. Better one stroke of genius in a faulty work than a mediocre correct work. One should search an author for that which expands the soul. Negative merit, such as absence of faults, gives no delight. In England Shakespeare's beauties prevail over his defects, but they diminish his glory abroad. No doubt surprise contributes to effect, but it is absurd to conclude that a comic scene should always be placed before a tragic one. Surprise should spring from intrinsic grandeur more than contrast. Nature is our model, and good taste comes from observing nature reasonably. Its principles are not incompatible with genius, but are to be discovered by the study of genius. Let it be admitted that Shakespeare has taste in his sublime passages, and lacks it when his genius fails.

To the highest beauties he adds the faults of his century and certain native English peculiarities. He did not imitate the ancients, but his genius was of the 'immediate' kind which paints from nature. He gave England a new literature and set his seal on her dramatic art. He was the first to depict extreme moral suffering, the bitterness of which might seem fictitious, but that nature recognizes the truth. The ancients believed in faith, Shakespeare and the moderns in philosophic necessity—made from memories of irreparable misfortunes, useless efforts, hopes that have failed. The ancients, living in a new world, had little past history and were too occupied with the future to depict misfortune in the heart-rending manner of Shakespeare. They dwelt little on death—the icy shudder that the fully alive man feels when he hears that he must die. With Henry VI, Richard II, Lear, nature's great debate between life and nothingness enthralls the audience. Shakespeare knows how to depict the mingling of physiological movements and moral reflections caused by the approach of death. Only he can make pity 'theatrical'—pity for the insignificant or contemptible. The effect is like life, and he interests us even in great men by purely natural sentiments. He inducts you into the glory which he describes;

<sup>1</sup> *De La Littérature*, 1800.

you pass through all the shades and gradations of heroism, and your soul reaches the height without ceasing to be conscious of itself. The fatalism in *Macbeth* does not exclude philosophic analysis of the soul's movements. The play would be better without the supernatural—but the supernatural is merely the shapes which the imagination makes objective. *Othello* shows how clearly Shakespeare perceived the link between the sexes—courage and weakness. Othello wins Desdemona by describing his dangers: and this is true to nature, for men do not win women by flattery.

Shakespeare's histories are inferior to his tragedies. England was the last of European countries to subscribe to the general good taste. Their liberty was founded on national pride rather than philosophic ideas. An English audience demanded alternate comic and tragic scenes—and the contrast of the noble and its reverse impresses disagreeably those with taste. Instead of shades of difference we get strong contrasts that are simply bizarre: although Shakespeare knew how to draw sublime effects from ordinary circumstances skilfully disposed—and we may be wrong in excluding these from our theatre. Like his contemporaries Shakespeare ignored literary principles, but he surpassed the Greeks in knowledge of the passions and of mankind. An author who had an audience so easy to interest need not be severe with himself. His scenes of horror are questionable on the ground that they destroy theatrical illusion, not that they excite too strong emotions. When Hubert brings the iron to burn out Arthur's eyes the moral effect is submerged by the physical sight. On the other hand, when Richard III meditates on his deformity, we feel the horror which it causes reacts on his soul and affects it for the worse. Philoctetes is the only example of represented physical suffering: and there the heroic causes of his wound interest the spectators in his sufferings. Physical suffering can be narrated, but not represented: not author, but actor fails to express it nobly—the senses, not the thought, revolt.

Shakespeare has painted like no one else the two most profoundly tragic situations in life—madness caused by misfortune, and isolation in misfortune: e.g. Hamlet, Ophelia, Lear. Madness, as depicted by Shakespeare, is the finest picture of the wreck of man's moral nature in the tempest of life. The French theatre has strict rules even for grief. Where Shakespeare surpasses is in depicting isolation: beside the torments of grief he shows man's indifference and nature's calm. The sombre English imagination represents a man cut off by his troubles, as by contagion, from all his friends. Society withdraws from him life before nature brings him death.

Humour (*plaisanterie*) tells us most of a nation's customs: a man is serious alone, but gay among others—and only those ideas which are already familiar raise a laugh. Like everything else humour is subordinate to recognized good taste. The kind of gaiety which springs

from combinations of wit has nothing in common with English humour. Only the genius of one man and the good taste of several can produce true comedy; and only the French can reach perfect taste and subtle observation of the human heart, such as we see in Molière. The reason is that an Englishman, absorbed in business, seeks pleasure for relaxation and is satisfied with any kind of relaxation. Domestic life, a strict religion, serious occupation, a gloomy climate make the English liable to ennui.<sup>1</sup> Instead of delicate mental stimulants they need violent shocks. Also the comic genius is a social one, but the English live either domestic or political lives. There is no intermediary social life: and it is in this frivolous region of life that subtlety and taste thrive. In political relations shades disappear and strong characters are developed. Great objectives abolish interest in all that has no practical use. English comedy is no whit characteristic: Falstaff and Pistol are caricatures, not true to life. Only in France is the most piquant gaiety also the most delicate. The kind of gaiety implied by 'humour' is of the blood as much as the judgement, and is connected with the climate and national customs. It is morose, almost sad—it gains distinction when it is uttered gravely—as praise from a brusque person becomes more piquant. English gaiety has a moral or philosophic goal: French aims at pleasure only. . . .

The gist of Madame de Staël's criticism is that one should search an author for that which expands the soul. We feel that Voltaire belongs to a past age, and that world-wide wars and revolutions have affected art. Freedom for the soul, and reality in art: these were two needs of the moment, and it is significant that Madame de Staël should find them realized in Shakespeare. She writes like one who records an experience rather than pens a treatise. She deals with Shakespeare's plays like a commentary on life, whence she may learn how to live in this difficult world, and perhaps how to die. That she mentions Henry VI, Richard II, and Lear in the same breath shows that her power to appreciate aesthetically was limited—yet she marks a transition stage. She has felt some of the greatest impressions from Shakespeare, and the memory of them modifies her judgement in the less familiar themes of English comedy and humour. If she cannot praise, she at least suggests that the fault may be partly her own. Her protest against scenes of horrors preserves all that is of permanent value in the Voltairean tradition.

## II

CHATEAUBRIAND<sup>2</sup> describes Shakespeare as a man who has made a schism in literature—deified by his own country, admired throughout the whole north of Europe, and elevated by some French-

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Marmontel, Saint-Marc Girardin, Taine.

<sup>2</sup> *Mélanges Littéraires*, 1801.

men above Corneille and Racine. Voltaire introduced Shakespeare into France, and his first judgements were impartial. But when Shakespeare was claimed as a model of perfection—above Greeks and French—Voltaire saw the danger. He attacked the idol, and to the end of his life blamed himself for wrong admiration.

Critics who insist on 'nature' and look upon distinctions of country and rank as prejudices are like those politicians who wish to abolish social distinctions and replunge their country in barbarism. Considering his age, and that he had no education or learning, one cannot admire Shakespeare too much. No one has seen deeper into human nature. In dealing either with passions or morals or politics, he has numberless thoughts to fit every circumstance of life. From the point of view of genius, not dramatic art, Shakespeare's fine scenes are isolated:<sup>1</sup> and here is the chief error of his English admirers. A scene should be linked to its subject, well motivated, forming a part of the whole, conserving the unities: but in these Shakespeare fails. As a great writer he is beyond question: consider the scene between Macduff and Malcolm—the truth and energy with which the misfortunes of Scotland are described; or the farewell of Romeo and Juliet, with its contrast of the charm of morning and the lovers' last pleasures, with the horrible catastrophe to follow. Shakespeare uses contrast greatly; he places joy beside sadness, and mingles pleasures and funeral processions. The musicians in *R. and J.* are true to life, and we see from the death of Phaedrus in Euripides that the Greeks used these effects. Like all tragic poets Shakespeare has sometimes struck a true comic vein—whereas no comic poet has ever risen to tragedy. He who understands the painful side of life can also represent its laughable side. Only Molière among comic poets is the equal of Sophocles and Corneille.

Shakespeare's thoughts and feelings are natural, but not his style—except in his finest scenes. Even there his language is often affected, and he lacks simplicity. We feel the uneducated man who does not know the exact meanings of words, and scatters poetic thoughts among trivial things: e.g. he enlarges on the Apothecary in *R. and J.*

Shakespeare's partisans would prove that there is no such thing as dramatic art. If tragic heights can be reached by flinging together disparate scenes without sequence and link, by mingling high and low, burlesque and pathetic, associating kings and porters, queens and herb-sellers, then any one might rival Sophocles or Racine. The rules of art spring from nature. Art separates what nature confuses, and chooses only the finest traits. Perfection does not destroy truth—so that Racine is more natural than Shakespeare, as the form of the Apollo is more human than that of an Egyptian statue. It is said that Shakespeare commands the resources of tears—but true tears flow from contemplating beauty, from admiration as much as grief.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. La Place, Villemain, Stoll, Schücking.

Time has pronounced in favour of the Augustan age against that of Trajan. May it not be that imagination over-prevalled in the age of Louis XIV? What we now call 'painting from nature' was then unknown. Let it be admitted that our own age by liberating subjects to be artistically treated has increased the circulation of ideas. Let us hope that a new writer, holding the balance between the two schools, but inclining towards the classic, may unite them and bring to birth the genius of the new century. . . .<sup>1</sup>

Chateaubriand marks a transition stage of a different kind from Madame de Staël. To read him suggests the thought that he was not drawn to Shakespeare by sympathy, but that study of Shakespeare had now become indispensable to the educated man. He regrets the great artistic triumphs of the past, he has the Latin feeling that art is produced by refining upon natural things. He is definitely anti-popular when he says that tears flow from admiration as much as grief. This is the language of the scholar, of the inheritor of a long culture; whereas to the half-educated art is emphasis: they wish to see the life about them staged or versified or compressed into a novel. Yet there are moments when unconsciously or unwillingly he steps within the modern circle. He admits that it is a great thing to combine comedy and tragedy, and he is less certain than his classical forerunners that a work of art should not be judged by its effect apart from rules. His last sentence even suggests that this more liberalized art may have a great future.

### III

TEN years later Madame de Staël<sup>2</sup> is again writing on Shakespeare and repelling the charge that he is a barbarian. She is evidently more assured in her own admiration and the sympathy of her hearers. Perhaps, she says, he is too much of a philosopher for the rapid effects of the theatre, so that it is better to read his plays than watch them. It may seem strange to accuse of over-subtlety one who stages such terrible scenes: but he unites opposing virtues and defects, and he is more versed in knowledge of the human heart than stage craft. His plays attract every class in England, whereas our finest French tragedies do not touch the people. The critic should not let faults of taste interpose between his admiration of true greatness.

It is possible to see many defects in Shakespeare's plays as adapted by Ducis for our theatre, but it would be unjust not to recognize beauties of the highest order. . . . When Talma acts he combines artistically Shakespeare and Racine. Why cannot dramatic writers effect the same union in their compositions?<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Staël (1801).

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Chateaubriand.

<sup>2</sup> *De L'Allemagne*, 1810.

## IV

SOME judgements on Shakespeare of N. L. Lemercier<sup>1</sup> that crop up among his dissertations on all kinds of poetry are worth considering. He finds that Shakespeare's genius gives to the subject of *Richard III* an extraordinary range and depth. Remove its coarse accessories, the bizarre incidents that degrade it, and draw out the pure gold from the mud that conceals it, and you will admire its sublimity. A people instructed by the wise, Addison cannot wholly lack taste and good sense. The duration of time in *Macbeth* makes the hero's sufferings seem longer to the spectator. The unity of graded passions and deep characters is consistently preserved throughout the melancholy intrigues of the plays of the English Aeschylus. These high beauties compensate for occasional disorder; and we cannot imprison his gigantic and astonishing works. Ask any honest man, prejudiced by education in favour of the rules, but who has seen a play of Shakespeare's performed abroad—and he will admit that the beauties so impressed him that he failed to notice any want of regularity. But if the plays are lopped and transplanted to our theatre they become unrecognizable. It must be admitted that the French better construct their dramas, interlink the scenes, and make every action turn on one pivot.

Alluding to the ghost scene in *Richard III*, Lemercier decides that no poet has ever expressed so fearfully the terror which overthrows the imagination of a criminal surprised by remorse—and, in spite of Shakespeare's defects, his inspired passages place him beside the high and rare geniuses of tragedy. It is noteworthy that the tender and pitiful creator of the story of *R. and J.* excels in the region of profound terror. But for the glory of art and ourselves, in this kind he and all other dramatists yield the first place to Corneille.

Excluding the bizarre things in Shakespeare, he deserves the great fame which he has won in England by his supreme art of drawing in large strokes all kinds of historic and impassioned characters. This fame will never succumb to the attacks which the faults of his age and his ignorance of rules drew upon him. The sombre Richard III, the terrible Othello, the dark Iago, the atrocious Lady Macbeth, the sad Hamlet, the sensitive Romeo, besides Coriolanus, Caesar, Brutus, will plead his cause, and form a kind of Michael-Angelesque gallery. The aberrations of his genius will not darken the flood of light which his torch projected into the night of his century. . . .

Lemercier's criticism somewhat recalls that of Madame de Staël, though she inclines to the human side of Shakespeare and he to the artistic. He is an interesting specimen of a critic who sees much of the best in Shakespeare and has the better chance of pointing out his faults

<sup>1</sup> *Cours Analytique de Littérature Générale*, 1817.

because he is not dazzled by the floods of light with which later critics hid the inequalities of the Shakespearian surfaces. He does not forget the rules, but they are in the background of his mind, and though, in his opinion, Shakespeare lacks taste, he is first of all concerned with the beautiful things. His profoundest remark is on the duration of time in *Macbeth*, and it occurred to him because he approached the play with a disinterested mind. It carries one step further the suggestion of an enfranchised art that we noted in Madame de Staël and Chateaubriand.

THE translation of Ducis was the occasion of the remarks of J. L. Geoffroy.<sup>1</sup> *Hamlet* to him is an entirely savage composition, though the hero is more humane than the Orestes of Sophocles. He shudders at his mother's crime, but wishes her to repent and live: though he does not pardon Claudius, but wishes him to be eternally damned. The tone and style of his first soliloquy on his mother's frailty are not noble, but the foundation is natural and interesting. Metaphors that please in one language may appear laughable in another; and what seems ignoble to us at this day may have been otherwise in the time of Elizabeth. The Ghost is terrible and necessary to the action: while that of Ninus is useless and makes us laugh. In Shakespeare's day people believed in *revenants*—and many people in England still hold this belief. . . . For the rest, Geoffroy decides that, with all its extravagances, the original *Hamlet* is full of movement and never fails to interest: that of Ducis is boring on the stage and unreadable in the study.

*Lear* exhausts every theatrical device: thunder, lightning, hail, forests, caverns, battles. A king who has been imbecile all his life goes completely mad. The style includes apostrophes to heaven, the thunderbolt, winds, rocks, all nature. Yet the sight of a madman on the tragic stage was so strange that *Lear* was played forty times in 1783. Cloyed with beauty, people turned to the bizarre, and in madness saw sensibility become sublime. Since that time we are grown used to represented madmen, and *Lear* has lost favour. Ducis, with less tact and genius than Voltaire, has plunged headlong into Shakespeare's extravagances and monstrosities. He has presented the French nation with the lugubrious and disgusting farces of this barbarous poet, whose only guide was his undisciplined imagination. A father who acts like *Lear* is a fabulous being: not only the cruelest of fathers, but the maddest of men. At such a crisis one would shut up a young girl, not abandon her on the highway. Kent, as a great nobleman, might have taken *Lear* to his own castle. . . . But the plot would have suffered had Cornwall shown a gleam of common sense or Kent acted more suitably. Never in theatrical annals has there been a more absurd conspiracy than this

<sup>1</sup> 1819-20 (*Cours de Littérature Dramatique*, 1825).



of restoring to the throne an old madman who has forgotten even his own name. Cornwall was lord of half England and might have exterminated the rebels: but things are not so in tragedies. . . . This severe criticism is needed to protect the theatre. Shakespeare is over-admired, and his absurdities have been celebrated. Such a guide will only mislead the talented.

There are to be found pearls in the Shakespearian dung-heap. His very irregularity is the cause of beauties which can find no place within a regular frame. But the things in him that are piquant and original become cold and trivial in Ducis: the French habit misfits this giant and hampers his liberty. Evidently Shakespeare wrote *Macbeth* to show how dangerous it is for a man to have a wicked wife. A weak man forced into crime by his wife is pitiable as a tragic hero. It is well to show that remorse follows crime, but a cowardly rascal, a superstitious visionary, who must learn courage from his wife, is merely contemptible. The witches are said to produce a great effect in the London theatre, but they fail in Paris. What shall we say of a soldier who murders his king and guest in his sleep—and shortly after repents from fear? Witches make him a criminal—and then ghosts convert him.

Even Ducis has felt it needful to soften *Othello*. It might well have been omitted, since Voltaire's *Zaïre* gives all that is interesting and really tragic in a like situation. *Othello* is a hideous negro, Desdemona has no excuse for her shameful choice, and the grave Doge, who should help the moral cause, pleads that of vice. No doubt *Othello* had served the State well and won victories, but the action of stealing a maiden from her father would wither his finest laurels. . . .

It is needless to say that Shakespeare is here seen as in a vacuum. Imagination is shut out, and the facts of the plays droop and perish. The writer's method is aggravated because he speaks of Shakespeare in translation.

## VI

STENDHAL (Henry Beyle)<sup>1</sup> denies that the unities are needed to produce deep emotion and true dramatic effect. To the Academician's argument the Romantic replies that if the spectator can imagine something he can imagine more. Enthralled by the action he forgets the time that elapses and concentrates upon the passions represented. It is not illusion—for illusion implies that a spectator believes the events of the theatre to be real. It is imperfect illusion, perhaps complete twice or thrice in an act for one or two seconds. A murder on the stage, or the arrest of a man, produces no illusion, and does not make us think such a thing true. Short moments of perfect illusion occur oftener in Shakespeare than Racine. All our pleasure in tragedy

<sup>1</sup> *Racine et Sh.*, 1823-5.

depends on their frequency, and the state of emotion, in the interval, in which they leave the spectator's soul. One thing which prevents them is admiration for the beauty of the verse. Shakespeare, by his practice, contradicts many of those petty habits which the teaching of La Harpe and others has caused us to contract. Worse still, we maintain in our vanity that these bad habits are founded on human nature.

There are two conditions of the comic: clearness and unexpectedness. We do not laugh at a man in the kind of difficulty that makes us think a like misfortune might happen to ourselves. Falstaff's account of the twenty rogues in buckram makes us laugh because he is a man of infinite wit and gaiety. 'Père Cassandre' does not amuse because we know well that we are superior to him. Molière's comedy is too informed with satire to raise a hearty laugh.

Romanticism seeks to give literary pleasure in the present: classicism revives what pleased our ancestors. Sophocles and Euripides were romantic, also Racine. Shakespeare was romantic because he gave to the English of 1590 a picture of the horrors of civil war, and also a subtle delineation of the heart and the fine shades of passion. The English of 1590, who were uneducated, were pleased to see on the stage those misfortunes which the firm rule of their queen had removed from real life. It needs courage to be romantic, for one must take risks. From Shakespeare can be learnt how to study the world we live in, and supply our contemporaries with the kind of tragedy they require, but—subdued by the spell of Racine—dare not demand. If Shakespeare is rhetorical it is to drive home a certain situation to an unlettered audience with more courage than subtlety. That a tragedy of Racine's may only occupy the last thirty-six hours of an action eliminates development of passion. It interests and impresses to see Othello loving in the first act and killing his wife in the fifth. Such a change within thirty-six hours would be absurd. Macbeth, an honourable man in the beginning, is seduced by his wife to murder his king and benefactor, and develops into a bloodthirsty monster. Nothing in poetry can surpass these changes in the heart which both move and instruct.

Even in 1670, at the zenith of Louis XIV, the court was an assembly of enemies and rivals. Envy and hatred dominated, and only two comic methods existed: mistakes in good taste—and likeness in manners or conduct to the bourgeois. Every morning a courtier read his destiny in the eyes of the king—and the habit spread downward from class to class. Molière's Orgon is convinced by phrases that prove nothing. The scenes in *Timon* are strong and beautiful because they establish the character of the misanthrope on firmer evidence than hearsay or the gossip of valets. . . .

Stendhal unites the critical and creative faculties, and his critical or analytic instrument has a fine edge. He has power to experience emotion and explain it subtly. His remark that restricted time elimi-

nates development of passion may be compared with that of Lemer cier. The unities are giving ground—but Stendhal has best of all defined the nature of illusion. The truth is advancing that imagination is the soul of art. Also, as we noticed with Madame de Staël, wars and revolutions have left their mark on art. The unnatural court life is no more—and represented life must be founded on reality.

## VII

IN the words of Victor Hugo,<sup>1</sup> the complex modern genius springs from the union of the grotesque with the sublime. There is a kind of comedy in ancient art—Thersites, Vulcan—but it is in its infancy. The Greek Eumenides are less horrible and therefore less true than the witches in *Macbeth*. The grotesque in art is now the richest resource offered us by nature. The eternal beauty of the ancients tended to pall; the grotesque is therefore a means of comparison, a point of departure whence one rises towards the beautiful with fresher perception. Contact with deformity gives to modern sublimity something purer and grander. Dante would have less grace if he had less strength. What we call ugliness is a detail in a great whole which escapes us, but harmonizes, not with man, but all creation. The two rival geniuses unite their double flame—and the result is Shakespeare. He himself is the drama: and the drama, where grotesque and sublime, terror and buffoonery, tragedy and comedy coexist, is the characteristic of the third epoch of poetry. Primitive times are lyric, ancient times epic, modern times dramatic. Eternity, history, life are their several themes: the Bible, Homer, Shakespeare. Christianity produced the drama by telling man that he was composed of two beings. The characteristic of the drama is reality, and reality results from combining naturally the two types, the sublime and grotesque—since true poetry consists in harmonizing opposite things. The duty of the drama is to disperse the cobwebs with which Lilliputians have thought to bind it. To those pedants who affirm that the ugly and grotesque are no subjects for art, we must reply that the grotesque is the comic, and comedy is part of art. If they insist that comedy should not be mixed with tragedy, we maintain that in the poetry of Christian peoples the first represents the beast in man, the second the soul. If the two branches are kept apart, instead of fruit there will be abstractions of vices and virtues. To the grotesque we owe such characters as Dandin, the Nurse in *R. and J.*, Richard III, Tartuffe, Mephistopheles; or the graceful-grotesque Figaro, Osric, Mercutio, Don Juan. The grotesque brings Romeo into contact with the Apothecary, *Macbeth* with the witches, Hamlet with the grave-diggers. In the scene with

<sup>1</sup> Preface to *Cromwell*, 1827.

Lear and his Fool it mingles its note with the soul's most sublime, melancholy, and brooding harmonies.

Shakespeare is a god of the theatre who unites in himself the characteristics of our three dramatic geniuses—Corneille, Molière, Beaumarchais.

Arbitrary distinctions crumble before taste and reason: and we can as easily dispose of the two unities. The only valid unity, that of action, remains untouched. The pedants base their theories on the very reality which is fatal to them. What is more unreal than the eternal vestibule in which the climaxes of our tragedies obligingly occur? They say the idea derives from the Greek theatre—but the prodigious extent of the ancient scene made it possible to embrace a whole locality. With us locality has become an element of reality—a silent witness whose absence would mar the greatest historic scene. No one would dare to represent Henry IV stabbed elsewhere than in the Rue de la Feronnerie. Unity of time is equally weak: an action forced within twenty-four hours is as absurd as forced to take place in a certain vestibule. Every action takes its own time, and it is impossible to allot the same measure to all kinds of events. To make unity of time and place cross each other like the bars of a cage, and force into it all sorts of facts and peoples, is to maim men and things and distort history. . . .

Such is a specimen of Hugo's early criticism of Shakespeare, and it may seem strange that the old errors still persisted in spite of such interpretation. But we must remember that his immense reputation was yet to be, and it is easy for us to be wise after the event and recognize the voice of genius in its beginning. He has vitality and sincerity, and he writes with the authority of one who will prove his own theories. The drama to him is a kind of Gothic window from which he surveys the true battle of life. And the high priest of romance was a many-sided man who descended from literature to politics and yet preserved his idealism. Had he possessed the true kind of humour his stature might have reached heaven. As yet, however, facility had not produced extravagance, and it may be that he has served Shakespeare better by a few reasoned discriminations like the above than in the torrents of molten praise that were to pour from his book of nearly forty years later. His youth appears in a tendency to classify somewhat arbitrarily.

### VIII

CHARLES MAGNIN,<sup>1</sup> on his return from a performance of *Hamlet*, finds it matter of congratulation that no sign of derision escaped an audience of two or three thousand persons. Our bad French habit, he continues, of measuring all by our own standard has yielded to disinterested attention to a great foreign poet. When Hamlet in

<sup>1</sup> *Le Théâtre Anglais à Paris, 1827 (Causeries et Méditations, 1843).*

untragic fashion sits on the floor to witness the play which was to unmask Claudius, it only caused slight surprise. And when the device succeeds, and Claudius rushes out in confusion, a universal cry of admiration proved that the sublime may be reached by means unknown to ourselves.

Shakespeare's genius is so picturesque, and he arranges his scene so exactly, and exactly defines his situations, that one might even understand his plays without the words. Such is his variety in *Hamlet*, especially the grave-digger scene, that ennui is impossible, and a play more than three hours long appears shorter than one of our own which lasts one hour less.

The mingling of tragic and comic has been another standard reproach against Shakespeare: but it is inherent in Hamlet's character. His bitter jokes and cruel buffooneries are so stamped by the serious part of his nature that what is grotesque becomes tragic,<sup>1</sup> and there is really nothing comic in the play. No one laughed when Polonius was called a rat and stabbed behind the curtain. *Hamlet* proves that jesting can heighten tragic impressions.

Continuing on Shakespeare's style with reference to *R. and J.*, Magnin remarks that he made the original story more striking, graceful, and energetic. We admire in *R. and J.* his impassioned dramatic genius, his bold grasp of his subject as a whole, and his exquisite beauty in details. No one has praised his style without reservation, or recommended that it should be imitated. His faults were due to an undeveloped language. We are shocked by the puns and quibbles of *R. and J.*, but their object is to reproduce the diffuseness of the love-talk. Lovers in every age and country of the world have been diffuse. The obscure subtleties and strange metaphors of other plays may not have this excuse, but their cause is excess of intelligence and imagination, and if they shock they never bore. Can any one say the same of our own tragic poets, even Corneille? . . .

Magnin corroborates Lemerrier, and we remember how the earlier eighteenth-century English audiences were ahead of the critics. The critic should behave like the unsophisticated spectator: forget the so-called rules of art and surrender himself to Shakespeare. If his soul is stimulated it matters not if Corneille and Racine have used contrary methods—and out of this stimulation are born true critical thoughts. Thus Magnin explains the mingling of comic and tragic in *Hamlet*—but the puns and quibbles of *R. and J.* arrest the flight of the soul and are a true fault. Apology, however, is becoming more and more the gate by which the critic enters Shakespeare's individual domain. Magnin's remark that the comic and tragic were inherent in Hamlet's character shows how the critics were not only discarding the outer unities, but penetrating to the inner unity.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Hugo.

## IX

TO Paul Duport<sup>1</sup> Shakespeare's name is a symbol of greatness and barbarism, a storm centre in European literature. It affects us less to read his plays or see them represented than to remember his words: all that he has uttered lives in us. No poet since Homer has so graven in our souls indestructible impressions; and he alone, since Homer, has created a world peopled with his own creations. He is thus poet in the primitive Greek sense of creator.

*Hamlet* is the most famous and unequal of the plays. It is chaos traversed by a few rays of light—a quarter of an hour with Plato and the rest in Bedlam. But however rare the flashes of genius, their light is so powerful that a single passage may be worth a whole tragedy. The end is a fearful butchery, the horror of which is only modified by its improbability and absurdity. The opening act of *Othello* is unsurpassed for dramatic effect and lifelike characters; but the story that follows, though powerfully conceived, lacks verisimilitude. The handkerchief falls to Iago too easily; and Iago, though admirably drawn, is too odious a monster to be the chief mover of a play. Here Voltaire's *Zaïre* compares favourably. *R. and J.* most of all abounds in defects and thickly sown beauties. The great interest of the situation, the art with which the leading characters are drawn, and the faithful picture of the state of society have overcome the reader's repulsion for the artificial and 'curious' dialogue. The error is one of judgement more than imagination: Shakespeare has accepted Italian conceits as local colour. *Macbeth* presents one of tragedy's most ample and interesting pictures. Ambition leads to crime, and crime to remorse. Shakespeare has painted remorse such as succeeding writers have only been able to imitate, never surpass. It is not a reasoning and speaking remorse, but remorse in action. Eloquence is in facts—facts remain, speech takes flight. But with this faithful representation of nature and passion is mingled a hideous phantasmagoria. Beside the strong simple word, the cry of the heart, are affected comparisons and strained images that dissipate the illusion and recall us to the poet's bad taste. The banquet is among the most effective scenes: conscience evokes the Ghost, and when Macbeth silences his conscience it disappears. In distinguishing Macbeth and his wife Shakespeare proves his knowledge of the sexes and his power to depict living beings such as God created them. The sleep-walking scene is a triumph of genius, but all that follows is confusion and improbability that we would not pass as melodrama. *Lear* has the most sublime traits of all the plays, and the most pathetic and heart-rending situations: but also extravagance and cold atrocity. Only *Lear* interests and is strongly drawn; the others are odious or improbable.

<sup>1</sup> *Essais Littéraires sur Sh.*, 1828.

In *John Shakespeare* not only contradicts history and tramples on classic rules, but even the rules of common sense. The Hubert-Arthur scene alone bears the mark of great genius. It is perhaps fortunate that Shakespeare's bad taste minimizes the effect. Were it strong throughout its horror would overpower. Art should omit those subjects which are too violent to please the soul of man. *Richard II* shows us Shakespeare's imagination characteristically never pausing to reject or prefer, but painting all things. He listens among the crowd for the echoes of the collapse of the throne: a gardener reveals to us the condition of the people. The mirror scene is fantastic and unlikely in so late a period of history. *1 Henry IV* has even less action and interest than the preceding. It is merely a historic picture with no connexion between the parts. The tragic part is cold and indecisive, but the comic part, although unrelated to the main action, is sometimes worthy of Molière. Its vulgar and ignoble jokes would be fatal with us, but not in plays written for the people, where abuse passes for humour—as cultivated people exaggerate in compliments. Even the comic part of *2 Henry IV* has declined. The Prince has abandoned taverns, and if he enters one his heart is absent. His dissipation has the sadness of farewell—while Falstaff's vice is no longer spontaneous, but calculated. *Henry V* is a chronicle in dialogue, without contrasts of characters and incidents. It lacks the variety which consists not in mere number of objects, but in presenting them artistically from different points of view: and nothing is more monotonous than perpetual confusion. The *Henry VI* plays show few traces of Shakespeare's beauties or faults. Only the Cade scenes reveal his eagle glance and profound observation. It would be hard to explain more forcibly the beginnings of revolution in ignorant minds. There lacks in *Richard III*, as in the other histories, some one to love and admire. If the heart is not interested in tragedy the attention will flag. The wooing of Anne is unreal, and fails to interest because the scene is not prepared. Buckingham and the other victims, when about to die, recall Margaret's predictions, and this gives the impression that Providence directs the action, and is as terrible as the fate of the ancient Greeks. The scene before the battle is strikingly improbable: that the same dream should visit two different persons. Shakespeare only gives the externals of Henry VIII; he leaves us to guess the state of his soul.

He makes us partially sympathize with Coriolanus's revenge by showing us his services to his country and the injuries which he received. Shakespeare excels in depicting superhuman characters at the extreme verge of the moral order. He does not here paint filial affection directly, as elsewhere. We only hear of it, but do not see it, and it is not made real by those characteristic traits which no author has used so well and so often. The play lacks Shakespeare's usual impartiality; he vilifies the Tribunes and people, and violates history in the

cause of art. For had he not made his enemies odious he could not have made the audience sympathize with a man who takes up arms against his country. The hero's farewell to his mother does not produce the required effect; and Shakespeare generally diminishes in him the affectionate feelings which should counteract political passions. Never has the poet's genius restored to life an historical epoch with greater power and truth than in *Julius Caesar*. He gets to the heart of his subject; he divines the interests, passions, feelings which inspire the chief actors and even the people. But he does not equally rediscover their language. Like painter or sculptor he shows us his persons in the right attitude, and makes us conjecture what they should say—but he does not tell us. The murder of Cinna is an instance of his art in making one fact typify the general situation or the mind of a people. The last two acts cause the reader's imagination fatigue and ennui. The story of Antony and Cleopatra, which Plutarch's straightforward narrative makes interesting, loses its brilliance and idealism on the stage. Antony is a madman who sacrifices life, fame, honour to an unworthy woman. With her love for Antony Cleopatra mingles ambition, the intoxication of pleasure, egoism; and her conduct and feelings are undecided. The other persons are insignificant—whereas Shakespeare usually draws his secondary characters carefully: but the play has not his hall-mark.

Antonio's melancholy is a fine touch; it has the distinct theatrical effect of a presentiment, and places the character of the merchant in harmony with the situation in which he is to find himself. It is the means of his declaring how assured he is of his financial state, sheltered from all risks—and it prevents the bond from appearing unreasonable. And yet the bond offends both taste and reason: taste because it suggests a hideous thing worthy of cannibals—reason, because no man would agree to such conditions. The passion of revenge ennoble Shylock's avarice. He is ridiculous and tragic at the same time—while Molière's Harpagon is only ridiculous. *M. for M.* is one of the best plays, although the good is confined to the first two acts; but these include beauties equal to anything in Shakespeare. It has no auxiliary exposition, but the action, as it develops, explains all. Angelo's proposal to Isabella proves genius of the highest order: to contrast dramatically two such characters is equal to Molière's highest effects. Shakespeare does not transgress comedy, but with great art shows us from the beginning the Duke watching all, so we know Claudio will not die. When genius inspired him Shakespeare was equal to anything, but in the intervals of genius he succumbed to the bad taste of his century. The Duke and Barnardine reveal the full force of his genius: for only he could make comic a scene bordering on the scaffold. We see every degree of vice and crime: Angelo the vicious hypocrite—Claudio the man made soft by pleasure, without strength or virtue, but



also without wickedness—Lucio the debauchee—Mistress Overdone and the Clown—finally, Barnardine at the furthest verge of human depravity, and so brutalized that the distinction is lost between animal life and the stroke of death.

The dramatic interest of the *Tempest* is feeble, and the situations vague and ineffective, with few of the sublime touches that redeem Shakespeare's faults. It amuses because it is a fairy tale, and though the action is null there is a great deal of movement on the stage and among the characters. When Prospero defeats the plot we see the meanest farce succeed the most philosophic poetry. But what Shakespeare does is to imagine a love more gracious and innocent than that of Daphnis and Chloe—and to oppose, by living allegory, the intellectual and material worlds. For this we forgive the many faults, including the outstanding one of dividing his characters into three groups, with no common bond but the designs of Prospero and the fleeting presence of Ariel. The action of *Cymbeline* is unreal, and the parts have no natural liaison. The characters too often change their minds and points of view, and the events are sudden and unprepared. Ennui, which springs more often from confusion than uniformity, is the final impression. The plot to make Benedict and Beatrice fall in love is excellent for comic effect, but unfortunately Shakespeare does not develop his conceptions. His fruitful imagination creates dramatic situations which he spoils by false dialogue.

*Timon* is a half-success; the hero's generosity and his friends' baseness are well drawn, but when comedy should become tragedy and a noble soul express anger nobly, then the action languishes, the language revolts, effacing the impression of wrongs and almost justifying them. The *Shrew* contains the greatest number of dramatic ideas, though only in the germ. Plentiful imagination contrasts with lack of art and reasonableness. The play is framed in a delightful intrigue which is too short, and has resources that might have been developed. *M.N.D.* is a true dream, and in France we should consider it a long mystification. The English forgive its extravagance because of some happy details and occasional fine speeches that are independent of the action; and they rank above the *Tempest* this play of unreal characters and incoherent plot. *W. Tale* is little worthy of Shakespeare, and if written to flatter Elizabeth (i.e. Anne Bullen's false condemnation) it proves once more that the greatest geniuses fail when writing from outer compulsion. *T. and C.* is a travesty of the *Iliad*, but is undoubtedly Shakespeare's, and strongly marked as his work. It is hard to believe that he wrote *L.L.L.*, where one scene and a few good touches are dearly bought by an impossible subject, eccentric characters, detached and improbable incidents, and a dialogue false, cold, and bristling with pedantries. It may stand as a historic monument, to preserve the kind of conversation once in fashion at the court of Elizabeth. Perhaps it

was Shakespeare's secret protest against the bad taste imposed upon him by his age. . . .

Duport might have been the link between the two schools—the fault-finders and the panegyrists—but for his lack of imagination. The first paragraph reveals that he has an immense opinion of Shakespeare, and we see from his first words on *Hamlet* that he can receive the true impressions. But he is critical in the bad sense of the term—constantly on the watch for petty faults. His impressions are spasmodic, and he is wide awake between them; his reverie does not persist; and therefore the greatest things in *Hamlet* or *Lear* do not prevent him from condemning the rest of the play. He does not co-operate fully with his author, and thus he condemns *Cymbeline* and *M.N.D.*, uses the word 'cannibal' of Shylock's bond, complains that we only hear of filial affection in *Coriolanus*, but do not see it, overpraises the *Shrew*, and is reassured by the first two acts of *M. for M.* because the Duke watches all, and so he knows from outside that his mind is not misleading him. He is right to say that the scene of the wooing of Lady Anne is not prepared, but his best remark is on 2 *Henry IV*—that the Prince's dissipation has the sadness of farewell.

## X

ÉMILE DESCHAMPS<sup>1</sup> considers France the most dramatic nation in Europe, unrivalled in comedy. It is unfair to call Molière the world's first comic poet: he is the only one. No doubt Shakespeare is the greatest tragic genius of modern times, and our dramatists are far behind him in creating characters, inventing stories, and in the language of passion and poetry of style—but after Shakespeare England has nothing really great. Shakespeare, however, has created modern tragedy, and the purest taste bows down before him. Voltaire, in limiting himself to a pompous style, excluded contrasts of habits and individualities of characters. The only way to make progress is to follow Shakespeare, as Racine followed Euripides. There is no question of dethroning our poets to set up a usurper: in the empire of art every kind of genius has its own throne. Shakespeare will only harm those who carry on the traditions of Voltaire. We should present our public with literal translations of Shakespeare because he is a genius who responds to modern passions and speaks to us in our own language. The imitations of Ducis are mutilated fragments; we may be given admirable single scenes, but never a whole play. It is time that the French public should see Shakespeare as he is, with his magnificent developments, the variety of his characters, his independent thoughts, fine mixture of comic and tragic—in fine, his new and original beauties, and even their inseparable defects which at least differ from those of our

<sup>1</sup> Preface to *Études Françaises et Étrangères*, 1828.

poets. All cultured Europe acknowledges Shakespeare's sway, and he is translated into every language. To the objection that we should not stage the obscene buffooneries and cold-blooded horrors that pleased in Elizabethan times, we reply that the great man had to allow for contemporary bad taste, but he worked in his monstrosities with so much art that they can be removed without harming the architecture of the play and the march of the action. . . .

Deschamps takes up the prophecy, confident with Madame de Staël, regretful with Chateaubriand, that the classic age is over, and a new art will develop on the lines laid down by Shakespeare. The mingling of comic and tragic is now openly stated to be one of Shakespeare's beauties—and from this we may measure the advance of public opinion.

## XI

ALFRED DE VIGNY<sup>1</sup> has the exquisite touch of the poet-critic. His words written a hundred years ago are true to-day, and they deal with the permanent things in life and literature. He finds cause for congratulation that all that remains of the unities is need to preserve unity of interest in the action. In old days a tragedy was the final solution of an action ripe from the moment of the raising of the curtain, with the result that it was hard to fill the framework of five acts. The dramatist of the future will use time generously, and create man not as species, but individual, and implant in his heart those germs of passion whence spring great events. Then, when the time comes, he will show his victims caught in the net of destiny: so that art will be like life. To awaken our interest we must be shown a true creature of God: we love him because he *exists*, because, like ourselves, he is a living being thrown upon the world—not what the muse of politeness calls a *hero*.

Shakespeare has touched the highest point to which modern tragedy can attain, and yet he belongs to his own age. His poetry and moralizing have not declined, because inspiration does not advance, nor does man's nature change; but society advances, so that what there is of divine or human philosophy should correspond with the needs of the society in which the poet lives.

## XII

VILLEMAIN<sup>2</sup> thinks that Shakespeare's fame now threatens the old reputation of the French theatre. We must seek impartially in his life, age, genius the source of his strange faults and powerful originality. If he knew no Greek or Latin he may have known Italian; and nearly all ancient and some modern works were accessible in translation. Nor was English poetry in a state of coarseness and

<sup>1</sup> Preface to translation of *Othello*, 1829.

<sup>2</sup> *Mélanges Philosophiques, Historiques, et Littéraires*, 1829.

indigence. The Bible as a school of poetry had replaced legends and ballads, and added to poetry, so far a pastime, seriousness and enthusiasm. The study of ancient languages opened up an abundant source of memories and images that acquired a strange kind of originality as they passed through the minds of the crowd. Some of the learning of the court overflowed into fêtes and public games. Astrology, sorcery, fairies, genii were living faiths. The melancholy English imagination retained these Northern legends like a national inheritance. At the same time the more educated became acquainted with the knightly fictions of southern Europe and the numerous translated Italian poems. A thousand perspectives were offered to the imagination—and England was the best-prepared field for a great poet.

Shakespeare rose above his contemporaries by his more perfect speech. He created eloquence, and this made his plays distinct from others. He wrote quickly, but never without thought and effort, and did not improvise like Calderon and Lope de Vega. His plays unite sudden accidents of genius, outbursts of enthusiasm, and depths of meditation. The Spanish theatre is like a fantastic dream—Shakespeare's, despite his faults, is the work of a vigorous imagination which stamps his most bizarre caprices with the reality of life. And yet he does not rival the ancient theatre, nor do we prefer him as a model. We read and admire him, but do not discover a new system of rules to replace the fine simplicity of the Greeks.

Tragedy in Shakespeare's day represented strange or terrible events, without unity of time or place, mingled with scenes of buffoonery. But into this barbarous framework Shakespeare, by force of imagination, originality, and eloquence, threw a crowd of sublime new traits, like our own Molière. He has no system but his own genius, he does not narrate, but throws everything outwardly upon the stage. Ben Jonson, Marlowe, Beaumont, and Fletcher misused liberty and lacked eloquence. Shakespeare's brusque and unconnected scenes<sup>1</sup> often contain something terrible and unexpected. Persons who meet by chance speak unforgettable things. The work may be confused, but the impression left is always strong. Sometimes he is obscure and affected, and expresses simple things with needless subtlety—but his century was a bad teacher. A century that favoured poetry and imagination retained something of the subtle barbarism of the scholars of the Middle Ages. In every European country except Italy taste was both rude and corrupt: the court of Elizabeth united pedantry and refinement.

Critics have hailed Shakespeare as a man who knew nothing, but created all—a profound metaphysician, an incomparable moralist, first of poets and philosophers. He is thought even to have invented the barbarism of his time. But all the absurd improbabilities and buf-

<sup>1</sup> Cf. La Place, Chateaubriand, Stoll, Schücking.

foonerics of his plays were common to the theatre. He is not a model to be imitated, but to be studied alone: his genius, with its poetry and eloquence, is an extraordinary accident. His plays are all based on novels or history, yet marked with his own seal. He paints character more energetically than exactly; for all his persons, even Romans, are of English type. No poet has ever been more national; he is the English genius personified, with its pride and freedom, roughness, depth, and melancholy. Hamlet's soliloquy is a product of the country of fogs and spleen.<sup>1</sup> Macbeth's violent but reasoned ambition would appeal to a people in whose country the throne had been long in dispute amid crime and warfare. The theatre was popular in England—and forceful words and throbs of passion came home to the people. And yet he appeals also to the enlightened by the violent shocks which his terrible pictures give to their peaceful habit of life.<sup>2</sup> Do not eliminate the gravedigger scene from *Hamlet*, but notice how terror and amusement pass over a huge audience. The most refined heads will crane forward to see the fragments of mortality exposed upon the stage. He reveals the English to themselves, but his power persists abroad. It is characteristic of genius to make local beauties and individual touches represent general truth. As with the Greeks the most national works become the most cosmopolitan; though Shakespeare, brought up in a less happy and less poetic civilization, has not the same proportion of universal beauties as the Greeks, so that only an Englishman compares him to Homer or Sophocles. He is infected by the Middle Ages; his barbarism has something of decadence; it is Gothic rather than naïve. Despite his ignorance he seems obsessed by the learning of the sixteenth century. But when he seeks to express a natural feeling he surpasses all existing eloquence. His tragic characters are real beings, who live in the imagination, never to be effaced. In depicting women his rude genius develops a hidden delicacy: their grace and purity are in contrast with the coarseness of the century.

It is laughable to see critics praise such a strange medley as *M.N.D.*—which was chance, ignorance, caprice. Let us praise a man of genius for the truth only, and we shall find that if Shakespeare often violates local and historic truth, and if nearly all his pictures show the hardness of the customs of his time, he expresses admirably the great passions of the heart—ambition, jealousy, love of life, pity, cruelty. What is more tragic than the apparent death of the soul which degrades without destroying a noble being? He often associates crime with folly, as if the soul became alienated to itself in proportion to its guilt: e.g. Richard III, Lady Macbeth. The historical plays are simpler and less unequal, especially the modern ones—for when Shakespeare treats the ancient world he frequently disfigures both national and individual

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Marmontel, *Staël*, Saint-Marc Girardin, Taine.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Riccoboni, *La Place*.

character. Brutus is drawn with admirable truth: and indeed Shakespeare was impressed by Plutarch who gave him the reality which, for the modern world, he took from his surroundings. The Roman character hardly shows in *A. and C.*, but the fatalism of vice going blindly to its ruin acquires grandeur from truth. Shakespeare's national historical plays are still truer. Some scenes, like the incomparable Talbot scene, simple as sublime, with its great thoughts and virile language, like the best in Corneille, were just brought to life by his powerful hand. Beaufort's death—a picture of despair and damnation—is characteristic of Shakespeare. Cade's rebellion gives the accents not of the poet himself, but of the rising mob. In the histories the absence of unities and long stretch of time allow effective contrasts and bring out all the extremes of human life. Richard III suffers agony as great as his crimes, and is slowly punished on the stage. Our twenty-four hours are too short to concentrate all life's pains and events.

Shakespeare's irregularities of style have their uses; he mingles prose and verse according to his subject. The cold speeches of the musicians next door to the dead Juliet—the association of indifference and despair—bring home the nothingness of life far more than the conventional pomp of our theatrical griefs. The common talk of two soldiers, the lively expression of their superstitious terror, their naïve and popular descriptions more dispose the thought to spectres than high-sounding poetry.

A different interest obtains in the romances. *Cymbeline* is full of interest and charm; the most involved plot is made luminously clear. Creative energy makes Caliban a strange mixture of fantastic and comic. At home Shakespeare is thought to excel equally in comedy, but not abroad. His comedies depend on intrigue, and do not depict manners or represent real life. To strange and complicated incidents, exaggeration, caricature, spirited dialogue which reveals author more than character, are due his comic effects. They have no moral aim, they amuse the imagination and arouse curiosity. It is an illegitimate kind, pleasantly touched by a man of genius. His genius breaks out no less in this crowd of sentiments, ideas, view-points, reflections that fill all his works alike.

French translation robs him of his greatness. His great characters lack space in which to move; his terrible actions and vast developments of passion burst the bounds of our rules. His poetry is no model like the Greek, nor has it Greek ideal beauty—but his reputation will advance with the inevitable spread of the English language. In America the strong sense of hard-working men will seize eagerly upon his powerful thoughts and profound sentences. His gigantic imagery will please minds used to the most magnificent scenes of nature—the immense forests and rivers of the New World. His rough inequalities

and coarseness will not shock a society which knows no court or aristocracy, and has the weapons of civilization without its refinement. If the genius of poetry awakes in the New World, its model will be Shakespeare. . . .

Villemain is more disinterested and keeps closer to facts than preceding critics who have praised Shakespeare for truth to nature or blamed him for breaking the rules. He accumulates a larger number of facts and examines them in an impartial manner, in order to estimate Shakespeare's genius correctly, apart from preconceived theories. Thus he finds pedantry and refinement united at the court of Elizabeth, and reckons with the influence of the Bible. Perhaps he is intellectual rather than receptive, inclined to judge rather than appreciate. He rightly insists on Shakespeare's imagination, but does not as yet suspect his art, and therefore predicts his enlarged fame in a newer world less bound by classical tradition. His criticism is learned, unprejudiced, and transitional, but also somewhat external: as if Shakespeare's place should be fixed by mutual consent rather than the casting-vote of the individual soul. He is no classicist like Voltaire or La Harpe, but he understands that classicism is still a force in the critical world. He is not a definite convert to romance like Stendhal, but he thinks the great writers of the future will be romantics. Even when he is at his best—in his comments on the grave-digger scene, or the musicians in *R. and J.*, or the speech of the soldiers before the Ghost appears—we note the hint of an appeal for a majority. He is to be commended for his open-minded manner of approaching the problem of Shakespeare's genius, and to be dissented from in many of his individual judgements—especially the Roman plays and the comedies. Between these it must be admitted that he has felt the strength of Shakespeare—though not his sweetness.

### XIII

WRITING on *Hamlet*, Barante<sup>1</sup> says that most of all it shows how, like nature, Shakespeare possessed the wonderful art of enchanting both the vulgar and the enlightened. Real theatrical success means universal suffrage. The conception of *Hamlet* lent itself to Shakespeare's width, variety, and universality. Strangely, indeed, within the frame of this philosophic tragedy Shakespeare has enclosed every kind of reflection on the world and human nature—and, as seems probable, revealed both himself and his epoch. The latter was one of rebirth, and so we find in *Hamlet* traces of surprise and intoxication in those newly attracted to learning and philosophy. In this confusion Hamlet seems almost in his element; and, in using thought instead of will and action, he forgets how to live.

His melancholy is greater than his sorrow; his assumed madness is

<sup>1</sup> *Mélanges Historiques et Littéraires*, 1835.

justified by no result, and he becomes more dissatisfied with himself than his lot. This is not the fault of the play, but its leading idea: it is Shakespeare's most unified work. All the characters are touched with pedantry, and talk without acting. The King's cunning and prudence only appear in words; Polonius expresses his political foolishness in learned language; Laertes his real grief in rhetoric; the grave-digger is a peasant-scholar; and even the Ghost explains chemical properties. The women are not thus, but finely drawn as always in Shakespeare, who never confuses male and female nature. The Queen and Ophelia never reason or dispute, but yield to impressions and the movements of the heart. The Queen is truly made up of contrary feelings; she has consented to crime and shame from feminine weakness, and thereafter she is as defenceless to remorse as she was to sin. Her affection for Hamlet, Ophelia's love, and Horatio's friendship show that the origin of his weakness is more in the miseries of human nature than the poverty and defects of his own character. Shakespeare succeeds in making him noble amid circumstances that might degrade him.

The practical men are no more efficient, and such is the general intention of the play. Every scene, even more than every character, helps to bring out the void and nothingness of human affairs. The progress of the action—without will, foresight, fate—suggests an idea of scepticism. Hazard, not Providence, produces events; the guilty are punished by accident, and with them fall the innocent. Hamlet, in his doubts, loses the sense of good and bad, and is weak, hard, cruel, disloyal. His punishment is just, and it is not surprising that also it comes by chance. Unity of thought and conception directed upon doubt and the uncertainty of this world's affairs caused this astonishing variety of scenes which follow each other without interconnecting, and produce by different methods the same impression. 'What are we?' is the moral of every scene; and from this point of view Shakespeare has envisaged the whole of human life.

Everything has a place in such a work: the allusion to the theatres scarcely seems a digression. Hamlet's meeting with the army and the grave-digger scene are not barbarisms, but the climax of a dramatic system. Ophelia's funeral is the real climax to a succession of events which have awakened interest in the enigmatic mystery of human destiny more than in any single person. The assault is more a means of concluding than a tragic conception. It was hard to unravel the knot because there was no knot: the action advanced at random. Our mental state after the play shares the same fatigue and indecision: doubt endures to the end. . . .

Barante's criticism is noteworthy for its cumulative force. The thoughts suggested by his analyses of separate parts insensibly unite in a common stream; and the result is a deepened sense of mystery. The explanation may not be final, but it is one that can never be overlooked.



He expresses the particular atmosphere of strangeness given off by the play. At times he errs in working out a theory too much in detail: e.g. his opinion of the Ghost.

#### XIV

SAINT-MARC GIRARDIN<sup>1</sup> discovers a strange taste in English literature—that of death. The unknown, vague, and horrible in death attracts the English genius. That Juliet should think not only of Romeo and her love, but with terror of the gloomy vaults, is hardly natural, but it pleases the English. A Greek or Italian lover would not find Juliet fairer in death, as does Romeo. Horror of the tomb seems to increase Romeo's passion—because these gloomy places suit the imagination of this child of Shakespeare's genius. When he left Juliet at dawn he spoke not such words of flame as at her grave. Such poetry shows the influence of the climate of England,<sup>2</sup> where disgust of life is more frequent than elsewhere, and also of austere Christian ideas. In the Italian version the lovers only think of their love, and only fear they may not find each other again; and death deprives Juliet of her beauty in the eyes of the Italian Romeo. Both are due to climate, for in the South life and beauty are sacred things, and man carefully avoids the subject of death as a sort of profanation; while in the North he encourages the idea, that he may better feel by contrast the charm of life and beauty.

The second influence is Christianity—but whereas Christianity made death a judgement, it is obscure in *Hamlet*: e.g. 'What dreams may come!' The Christian does not argue thus, but Shakespeare has boldly staged doubt, and diverted from their ends Christian reflections on death. Death should serve to repress men's passions, but Romeo proves how it can inspire stronger passion; and Hamlet, about to kill himself, stops uncertain about what lies beyond the grave. It is due to Shakespeare that death and doubt of the future are frequently used in poetry. Hamlet hesitates in revenge and love, and only avows his love when Ophelia is dead. It is a trait of uncertain and weak characters not to know what they desire till they can no longer obtain it. Preponderance of thought and speech over action, and weakness, form the basis of Hamlet's character. Take from the heroes of suicide their grand sentiments, penetrate their anxious souls, and you will find nothing but weakness and inertia.

Shakespeare and Sophocles have the same idea of the sacred rights of fathers: beneath this sacred character vanish the crimes of Lear and faults of Oedipus; and the child who breaks the sacred law will die before his time. Oedipus dies with a dignity almost divine; Lear,

<sup>1</sup> *Cours de Littérature Dramatique*, 1845.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Marmontel, Staël, Villemain, Taine.

although mad, dies with all human dignity. The latter is wanting in modern novels, such as *Goriot*. Sophocles and Shakespeare spiritualize death and thrust away material circumstances: Sophocles makes it divine, Shakespeare purifies it from the taint of madness. Both are persuaded that in the death of man nothing touches except what is truly of the man—that is the departure and farewell of the soul. The modern romancer materializes death and takes the soul from man.

Shakespeare treats the pastoral in a philosophic manner. He is never duped by the sentiments which he stages—and even when he paints enthusiasts he is careful not to share in their enthusiasm. He may represent a king who becomes a shepherd, but he himself is under no illusion and realizes that it is improbable. Touchstone defines pastoral life as those who are disgusted with the world would wish to live it: and this is the false idyll which Shakespeare puts on the stage and ridicules. He never fails to give both sides, and, like Pascal, raises those he has degraded and degrades those he has raised. True painter of humanity that is neither always good nor always bad, his judgement equals his imagination. *A.T.L.* is divided between enthusiasm for the eclogue and mockery at the eclogue. Reverie can be a good thing for the disillusioned, and even melancholy has its charm, but one must not exaggerate. Reverie of a melancholy kind borders on inaction and misanthropy. Nothing in excess, nothing absolute: this is the core of Shakespeare's wisdom.

*Cymbeline* shows the same sagacity and penetration. The two young princes have the intuition of a more brilliant world, and would know it. Belarius has known it, is disgusted, and satisfied in retirement. The world makes solitaries, and solitude makes worldlings. Shakespeare avoided the Spanish and Italian pastoral, and to worldlings opposes solitary people and even bandits (*Verona*) rather than the conventional shepherd. His genius rejects all unreality, but there is one sentiment of the romantic eclogue which pleases him—unsophisticated love. And beside Ferdinand and Miranda he places Caliban. Caliban is the brutal, not the simple, savage of those who contrast the virtues of primitive barbarism with the vices of civilization. Shakespeare opposes his profound good sense to the capricious censurers of civilization. And yet civilization makes Caliban worse. Shakespeare mockingly typifies primitive barbarism in Caliban, and European civilization in a bottle of brandy. Miranda is a beautiful, pure, and tender woman, yet she lacks the scrupulous delicacy which Christianity discovered in woman's very nature.

Shakespeare describes human nature impartially, and takes no sides, especially with women. Portia expresses the full force of conjugal love and also its doctrine. She feels the dignity of her position of wife and would share all Brutus's troubles. She is a truly Christian wife who

wishes to share her husband's good or bad fortune; whereas Plutarch's Portia shows how the idea of marriage was developing in pagan society and preparing itself for the sacred character that Christianity would impart to it. It is not the least charm of Helena and Imogen that they express their love in more modern fashion—Helena more poignantly and graciously, Imogen more strongly and dramatically. Helena's impulse becomes duty; her courage which sprang from passion settles into virtue. Her pious and tender resignation, even to her husband's unjust will, is one of the most characteristic and touching traits of conjugal love, and one that Shakespeare has best expressed. Imogen on the way to Milford Haven shows that a wife can be as passionate as a mistress. *T. and C.*, where the frame is more serious than the picture, is one of Shakespeare's strangest works. Cressida perjures herself not deliberately, but because she is shallow hearted and volatile. Her protestations of love to Troilus are sincere, but in the hands of Shakespeare—grand inquisitor of human nature—she becomes self-revealing and lets us see the kind of sensibility which makes her inconstant. She is seduced by anything that is graceful and brilliant; she is sensitive enough to be attracted, and she also attracts. Wishing to depict an inconstant, not an ambitious or mercenary, woman Shakespeare carefully dissociates any calculation of profit from her changes. He knows that emotions are linked together, and a sensitive heart, under the shock of lost love, is easily seized upon by another emotion. In the case of Lady Anne (*Richard III*) she has hated and cursed too much—she has given too copious an outlet to hatred and grief. Nothing remains within her to uphold her faith, and like all sensitive persons she belongs entirely to the emotion of the moment. Portia and Imogen, equally tender and sensitive, are supported by duty, and therefore strong. The passion of the others springs from sentiment, and knows nothing of duty—and therefore shifts from one object to another. Where emotion is a law to itself, where conscience never opposes the heart's impulses, the moral being yields to the natural. . . .

Saint-Marc Girardin writes of Shakespeare as a philosopher rather than poet. His methods are those of the laboratory; he may be right; but the specimens are no longer living when they come into his hands. His remarks on death in *R. and J.* have a curious interest, but they deal with the echo rather than the sound; for what makes the play incomparable is the urge of life and love in the present. The criticism of *Hamlet* also makes us doubt whether the mere analyst can teach us much about Shakespeare. But when he speaks of the pastoral, of Belarius and the young princes, of Cressida, and Lady Anne we partially retract. When the soul is less alone with its pains, when its emotions spread to worldly things—become socialized—we may by an inverse process measure its force by the marks on those whom it has

struck, and (Cuvier-like) reconstruct the Shakespearian world and its author's relative greatnesses.

## XV

MADAME DE STAËL thinks that of all authors Shakespeare has best painted moral suffering: he is above the Greek tragedians in philosophy of passion and knowledge, but below them in perfection of art. Chateaubriand agrees that no man has seen deeper into human nature—into passion, morals, politics, affairs of nations. Stendhal says that he gives pictures of fine movements of the heart and finest shades of passions; and Duport, that he excels in depicting superhuman characters at the extreme verge of the moral order. Villemain speaks of his profound truth to character and shades of nature and sex. Saint-Marc Girardin calls him a true painter of humanity, neither always good nor bad—with a distaste for exaggerated sentiments.

There are many opinions on the quality of his imagination. Madame de Staël calls it the sombre English imagination; Geoffroy, undisciplined imagination; Duport, too comprehensive; Villemain, excessive and unrestrained. Magnin gives him excess both of intelligence and imagination. On the other hand, Saint-Marc Girardin says that his sagacious judgement was equal to his lively imagination. Duport also thinks his intelligence out of proportion to the little taste allowed him by his age.

Lemercier speaks of his supreme art in character-drawing. Duport says that he paints living beings as God made them; Villemain, that his tragic characters are real beings—that he has the great art of creating characters and making them living and recognizable by smallest details; Saint-Marc Girardin, that of all dramatists he is most impartial in representing human nature.

Chateaubriand denies him simplicity of style. Magnin calls him an architect of the drama; Duport, a poet in the sense of creator. Villemain says that he created eloquence, and, although he had no system, he has passion and poetry—and emotion and eloquence have never gone further.

Victor Hugo calls him the god of the theatre; Deschamps, the greatest modern tragic genius; Vigny says that he is at the top of modern tragedy; Duport, that his genius was of the highest order; Barante, that he had universality. Madame de Staël considers his character equal to his genius, and himself impartial as a superior being. She adds that he had Machiavellian irony; and Saint-Marc Girardin, who agrees that he was impartial, gives him cruelly true observation. Stendhal calls him a romantic who studied the actual world. . . .

The half century covered by these critics has seen a steady growth of appreciation of Shakespeare. The general impression is of an intellectual phenomenon unique throughout the ages in power, but still

looking strange beside classic models. In recognizing his knowledge of passion and character, the French critics do not fall short of their English contemporaries. The English traveller from Paris to Dieppe, passing through Brittany, feels as if he were already in England, so familiar is the scenery: and such is the impression from these collected French writers.

## Chapter XI

### GERMANY 1823-1846

I. HORN. II. TIECK. III. BOERNE. IV. GANS. V. HEINE. VI. LUDWIG.  
VII. RÖTSCHER. VIII. KLEIN. IX. CONCLUSION.

#### I

FRANZ HORN<sup>1</sup> writes first of *Macbeth*, which he calls a tragedy of destiny—a struggle represented by Macbeth, who is the prey of necessity, because his free will is not yet perfected. To Shakespeare his fate was not inevitable, but due to lack of faith in his freedom which he does not understand how to complete. Shakespeare knows of no one-sided necessity, but only of a freedom that has become a beautiful necessity, or a necessity exalted into freedom. The necessity to which Macbeth succumbs, because he is not wholly free, lies in his own heart, and the dark powers use its weakness to accomplish their purpose. They choose their moment well, and we can follow closely the struggle in his mind, but he would have overcome them had it not been for his wife. She has been called the supreme embodiment of ambition, but Shakespeare (more deeply) makes her ambitious for her husband. She is a female tiger, while his softer nature is inclined to melancholy. She embraces him with true love, and her affection is bound up with the nerves and roots of her being, almost to a weakness. The two would have been devils but for the humanizing link of emotional passion. Macbeth finally dares, not for the crown, but for his wife's sake: otherwise her reproach of lack of courage would not so have affected him. He commits further sins, without her knowledge, for her sake that she may enjoy the fruits, while he bears the punishment of tormented conscience. She does not reproach like an ordinary woman, but only reminds him that what is done is done, and tells him that he needs sleep. Her illness and sleep-walking come on after he leaves her; while he is with her, and his hero-eye lights on her with compassion, even the torments of conscience cannot gain power over her. When he sees all life crumbling to pieces he still has deep, loving, sorrowful pity for his wife, and asks anxiously after her. The words, 'To-morrow and to-morrow . . .', express the despair of a man who has lost all since he has lost love. It has been falsely objected that his first speeches after the murder is known are artificial. They contain truth and nature, and work in him like a poison, because it is his first crime, and the hideous feeling grows on him that he has for ever separated himself from himself.

Horatio is not Hamlet's friend in the higher sense of the word. Had he been a man of unusual intellect he would have influenced Hamlet

<sup>1</sup> *Sh.s Schauspiele erläutert*, 1823, 1827.

and changed the course of events. Shakespeare did not intend this, and it is truly tragic that Hamlet, in his need, can find no greater friend. Horatio's exhortation to Hamlet not to follow the Ghost has not been much noticed, but is important. The calm unimaginative man feared Hamlet's madness—a fear that was to be justified—as soon as the Ghost disappears. Hamlet thought himself stronger than he is, and he at once shows mental disturbance. When he promises an 'antic disposition' and uses the word 'perchance', it implies that it would produce no great result. He only has a vague idea that it will enable him better to watch over his uncle; and it also gives him occasion to exercise his wit. Fate does him an ill turn when it deprives him of his supreme opportunity by substituting to his sword-thrust the poor half-honest, half-wise old fool Polonius in place of the King. It is inevitable that the fourth act should drag, now that the hero has let slip the most propitious moment for putting forth his highest powers, and committed a miserable crime into the bargain. He gradually realizes this, and then withdraws so deeply into himself that he almost forgoes any possibility of ever acting at all. Acts IV and V are therefore like an epic or romance, containing incidents, situations, glimpses of character, profound observations, and things done without or almost against the will. In the midst of this terrible work appears the grave-digger like a kind of chorus.

At first sight the King and Queen appear unchanged at the beginning of the fourth act. But the truth is that half-repentance makes men worse by disabling them. The Queen's horrible tedium makes her give up *all* repentance. Hamlet's words, like daggers, had seemed to crush her, yet she is on terms as good with the King, if not better—as if more firmly fixed in the delusion that she no longer has power to amend. She is worse, having coquetted with the thought of amendment and then thrown it aside. Her touching lament for Ophelia and the flowers she strews do not contradict this. One must judge very fundamentally a woman who could win from the old heroic king love that persisted beyond death, before declaring her wholly lost.

The blooming, healthful, young Fortinbras is recognized by intelligent readers to be a *deus ex machina*; but the reason for his monosyllabic habit is that nearly every one in the drama suffers from a plethora of words, and hence the spoken word loses for them its healing power. If the State is to be saved and a new era begun all this must be changed, and the simple word, accompanied by appropriate action, regain its spell. Such a time will soon appear—and Fortinbras is its representative. Ophelia is an instance of the frequent fate that overwhelms the innocent with the guilty. Self-pity on her part might have been moving—but far more so is it to leave lamentation to the reader, as she does here. A deeply tragic idea underlies the grave-digger's wit. By the close of the fourth act the whole earth seems to be falling to pieces,

and the times are indeed out of joint. Fortinbras is far off, the King and Laertes discuss a poisoning plot. Such a country can have no king or government, and must surely fall. A churchyard is a welcome contrast, and a man sane, healthy, supremely original, one whose fantastic impertinences we forgive because he is wholesome and harmless, and brave enough to jest over graves and over the world as a whole. He settles things for all time and bears himself like a king. But what does Hamlet in a churchyard? Well, he was now conscious of his own weakness, and has given over his vengeance into the hands of fate or chance. Never really alive, he was now more than half dead, and finds the presence of graves congenial. All this displeases Horatio who here shows himself poorer in idea than elsewhere, and is moved neither by Hamlet's speech nor Yorick's skull. We note how the 'young' Osric lives in this atmosphere of death and foreboding, conscious of nothing. He draws from Hamlet the last spasm of wit, humour, and scorn. A last word on Ophelia: love appears to Hamlet to be too good for this world, and he feels that he no longer dares to enjoy it.<sup>1</sup> His outburst at the grave, 'I loved Ophelia . . .', is genuine. No solution of the problem of the play is here attempted; like a sphinx it faces us with a question.

It is both Lear's error and sin that he resigns his kingship yet wishes to retain royal dignity. A man should not desert his post except at the bidding of a higher power, not for a mere whim. His madness does not overcome, but rather exalts him, so that he still wears an invisible crown. Cordelia's defeat seems unjust; but history and ethics prove that virtue is not always rewarded. Shakespeare will not be false to an eternal law to gratify false sentiment. And there are sufferings after which the heart is never whole again and can never enjoy life. He who has undergone the fate of Lear does not *suffer* but *welcomes* death. The Fool in *Lear* is Shakespeare's grandest and most tragic fool. He has more sense than all the rest put together, is of a noble and lovable disposition, with clear insight into the old King's weakness, but no one loves him more faithfully. His biting speeches belong to his office, and he knows that in his terrible sufferings a slight annoyance is a relief to the old man, and better for him than constant depression.

We must remember that Othello is a genuine African, that his bravery differs from the Christian European hero's. The Venetian Senate understand he is a volcano, but they know how to make use of him. His bravery wins Desdemona's love, and love ennobles him as much as it can, but fails to calm his passions, only chains them. He knows himself well, and feels not unworthy of Desdemona, and in this feeling alone lies the later possibility of jealousy. Inspired by love, he feels in temporary, but not perfect, possession of many virtues. Love has made him human, and were this destroyed the old chaos would

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Croce: 'He cannot love, for love is love of life.'



return. As he does not trust himself it is possible to mistrust the beloved. The passions flame forth that were only slackly chained; and Shakespeare, true to eternal nature, does not veil their significant expression, nor spare the exact picture of the crime of which Othello accuses Desdemona, nor the swoon, nor the foaming at the mouth, &c. Until Othello imbibed Iago's poison he has watched himself with scrupulous care, conscious of his enormous passions. He confronts Brabantio calmly; when called to arms he stands plain and simply as man and commander; at Cyprus he asks in a dignified and patient manner, after the cause of the tumult: but here we do see the limits of his self-control. As soon as Iago has poisoned his imagination he is already half lost. Alone among dramatists Shakespeare has worked jealousy into a purely tragic picture. Othello fears not physical but spiritual death if he is forced to recognize that his wife is unfaithful. His jealousy is therefore more than jealousy, since only she represents for him love and virtue on earth, and if she falls everything falls with her. Had he spoken one considerate word or questioned her quietly he would have been saved, but the hideous entanglement is that he cannot speak with her, but only with Iago.

Desdemona is guiltless except for the one sin against her father. He was a hasty, proud man, and she could only have expected refusal and perhaps loss of liberty; nevertheless wrong is wrong and revenges itself. Even the ease with which Othello won her sows the first seed of mistrust in his glowing heart. She does not understand the sin of which she is accused, and hence does not attempt to avoid the appearance of it, as do those who know sin. She is naïve and unsuspicious, completely ignorant of mankind, and particularly of men. External cause hardly explains Iago's pursuit of Othello. The suspicion that he utters seems self-concocted: and what was his wife to him? He has no reason to hate either Desdemona or Cassio, and he accomplished the harm he intended Cassio with two glasses of wine. The nature of vice answers the question why he went further. He is unhappy and dissatisfied and wishes to be the reverse. Virtue is beyond him, and seems to him uninteresting, while vice is piquant and exciting. So he does homage to vice and treats men like marionettes—to destroy one of whom does not seem to him of much consequence. Had Cassio been a deeper and more interesting man it would have interfered with our sympathy for Othello and Desdemona; and were Othello less interesting he might appear almost incomprehensibly hoodwinked.

Poetry, Youth, Love, prevail in *R. and J.* The question forms itself: how did this youthful pair deserve their unhappy fate? It is not true that they 'deserve their fate' as some critics have implied—but neither are they models of virtue—as Shakespeare himself admitted. They are two noble natures full of exuberant life, their pulses and veins suddenly inflamed with love. 'Fire and powder consumed in a kiss' is

the thought that runs through the whole play. Here we have the true Shakespeare who differs from other poets, who neither knows nor wishes to know anything of the division of love into spiritual and sensual. The whole man loves, for only the whole man can love. Juliet knows nothing of prudery or coquetry; she is not ashamed of her love, or, if so, she would be less virtuous. Spiritual insight is always instantaneous, and when assured that Romeo's love is pure she makes up her mind at once. The hostile world cannot prevent this love from coming into being, but it will not let it continue. The question whether two human beings can love too ardently, Shakespeare answers like a true poet. Man is an imprisoned god, and only religion and love help him to bear his imprisonment. They assure him of future and eternal freedom, and even help him to enjoy it here.

Old Capulet is jovially coarse; his wife's coarseness is of a more serious type. Because they are what they are Juliet's action is excused. Many poets would have avoided the scolding scenes, but Shakespeare is confident that Juliet will not suffer in the reader's imagination because she is called 'green-sickness carrion', &c. She so glows with beauty that not one coarse word cleaves to her. The love of Paris is a contrast to Romeo's, yet he becomes dearer to us at the way in which he takes Juliet's death. To Mercutio Shakespeare gives characteristic Northern humour, but never forgets he is a Southerner. His death is the lever of the whole play, and Shakespeare has wisely steeped him in mirth and frolic, so that his fate overcomes us with a feeling half fearful, half smiling, and this gently prepares us for the deeper emotion roused by the tragic end of Romeo and Juliet.

The lovers do not perish in vain as guiltless victims; they are transfigured before our eyes, and no weak emotion mingles with our exalted feelings. But the supreme irony is that, despite these feelings, we still ask why the rival houses did not conclude their strife before? If blood was wanted, why did not that of Tybalt and Mercutio suffice? Now the dearest treasures of both houses are dead, and those who profit most are Sampson, Gregory, Abraham, Balthasar, who need no longer brawl about the streets in the cause of their masters. Besides a love story, therefore, Shakespeare gives us a picture of deep human life, that harmonizes emotion, exaltation, and irony. Even the irony is softened, for 'better late than never': and the peace of the city is important enough to be worth five lives.

It is a delight to note Shakespeare's manifold and sure ways of dealing with the wonderful. In the *Tempest* he carries out his intention in the simplest way, truly representing nature as the greatest of wonders. He gently leads us to believe in Prospero's power to command nature, and we gladly believe in this higher power in man. All wonders become natural, almost like trifles, playing around us. That higher power does not reside only in Prospero. Ferdinand and Miranda

overmatch the wonders of nature, in which they rejoice as in some delightful play. The supreme wonder is in their own bosoms: love, purely human, and therefore divine.

Although Menenius is clearly and finely delineated, he is often considered a mere appendage, but he is far more, and as essential to Coriolanus as Antonius to Caesar, and helps us to know him exactly. In the first acts the inferiority of the hero's opponents leads us to estimate his character falsely, but the last acts are entirely disillusioning. So far he had sinned only in words, and banishment seems an excessive punishment, although to some extent his words were deeds. But now they are undeniable acts, hardly to be excused. One who can wholly reverse patriotism can never have loved his country truly, and his crime was long premeditated. Formerly as member of one of Rome's noblest families he had won his laurel crown in defending his country. From thenceforth he became the voice of the richest and most distinguished, and ended as the enemy of his city. His behaviour when he opposes the rationing of the corn makes it impossible that we should pity him later. He is more like a wild beast than a man, and the very word anger is too noble for his state of mind. His cruel scorn disennobles him, for nobility has no weapon against the hungry.

With all his faults he is upright and open—and it is this which displeases his mother. He should pretend, and watch his opportunity—should first have been consul, and then might easily have carried out his main plan. In all else but this power to pretend he is the image of his mother. The scene where they part shows that this cunning or prudence is allied to commonness. A nobler nature would have been overwhelmed with sheer sorrow, but she gives way to curses. Like many she can be outwardly civil when all goes smoothly, but great trouble exposes the chaos of her nature. In the final scene between mother and son we recognize the conquest of the individual, persuaded of his own powerlessness. Coriolanus does not deliver Rome, but his monstrous error is brought home to him, and he would gladly make amends for it; but full amendment is impossible, since treachery to fatherland is not lightly retrieved, and he remains for ever separated from it and from himself. Only then does he claim our sympathy, and, as with *Lear*, after certain suffering death is welcome. If the critics have taken his part it is because his antagonists are unworthy, and we understand that they arouse his anger. Yet his behaviour was such as to make the crowds even worse. Nearly every one in the play is in the wrong, but above all stands out the idea of the State and of the country. . . .<sup>1</sup>

Horn's work has been called insipid by more pretentious critics, but it has the virtue of quiet sincerity. The test to which he subjects Shakespeare is that of the daily life with which he is familiar. If

<sup>1</sup> Cf. MacCallum (1910) on *Coriolanus*.

Shakespeare's characters were around us now and mixed in our affairs, how would their actions strike us by contrast with those of ordinary people? This may not be a supreme test, but the person who employs it draws upon his own experience, and every one who brings to Shakespeare a living thing finds his reward. That Horn's experience is limited we see from his rather sentimental notions about Macbeth. He says some wise things about Fortinbras, but explains the gravedigger scene in too fanciful a manner, as if Shakespeare had invented the incidents of the play—though it must be admitted that he feels deeply the deathlike atmosphere of the play as a whole. In *Lear* he does not rise above the commonplace; but the note of surprise in *Othello* stimulates his critical faculty. What if an African should appear in our own circle, falling into swoons and foaming at the mouth! Why does Iago, who had fulfilled his object with two glasses of wine, continue to work evil? There is a mystery about passion that transcends the respectable world. *R. and J.* contains some typical judgments—the image of Juliet in the reader's mind unaffected by abuse, and the servant-gainers by the restored peace between the houses. The words about the mother of Coriolanus are perilously near the gossip of a small society.

## II

LUDWIG TIECK, writing of *R. and J.*,<sup>1</sup> discovers long preparation behind the apparently sudden outburst of love in Juliet. Her heart must have nourished itself with pictures and imaginings, and she had listened not in vain to her nurse's conversation. Aroused feeling now takes the shape of a noble and serious passion; all the forces of the spirit are quickened; and whatever of love is sweet, lovely, grave and playful, childish and despairing now flows from her inspired lips. Life itself, death, and annihilation are insignificant compared with love. Romeo's love is less lofty, his spirit wilder, his fire more hasty and inconsiderate. He is more ready to challenge destiny, and he defies it tempestuously when it takes him at his word. His nature is darker than Juliet's: in the garden scene his soul blossoms forth, but in happiness and unhappiness he is violent and rough. Yet this manfulness, after all, is in life, which gives aroused passion its sense of greatness and power. Sooner or later this superabundance of life drags itself and the beloved object into the abyss. Ideal love, unclouded by passion, is not dramatic. Shakespeare certainly does not deal in it, but gives us human beings, developing, according to their individuality, in the midst of given surroundings. Everything is true and lifelike, connected with these characters, down to the smallest accidentals. Shakespeare pours forth everything out of a full heart, as if he himself had experienced the conditions he pictures. Before meeting Juliet, Romeo's

<sup>1</sup> *Dramaturgische Blätter*, 1826.

heart was filled with tenderness and longing, but it had found no true object. He sinks into a dream, and no one knows if it is as serious as he wishes us to believe. His melancholy is not without humour, and he amuses himself by wandering on the borderland of madness, avoiding yet seeking out his friends, communicating his feelings in playful antitheses, or descriptions of his beloved one, or hints of suicide. The story needs this, for had he loved Juliet for long he would have been capable of a quieter sorrow, resignation, and submission to fate, and his tragic end would have been impossible. The close of the tragedy is only due, in appearance, to a trifling chance. It depends on Juliet's, and more especially, on Romeo's character. Were he more composed and cautious, not immediately turning to suicide as a remedy, he would not be Romeo. He would have sought information from the Friar, and everything would have been saved. The tragedy is inherent in the characters. That the blossom of love dies so quickly, and the whole of their life's joy is comprised within the few hours of a summer night, is tragically affecting. It is the elegiac lament of our mortality sounding through all joy and beauty. In no other poetic work have longing, love, delight, death, the grave, with all the terrors of corruption, been closer intertwined, or brought nearer home to our thoughts and feelings.

Shakespeare makes wonderful use of Lear's great outbreak of mad and passionate rage to put into his mouth the loftiest truths and profoundest thoughts. He has the exceptional boldness, unknown to most playwrights, of mingling comic and serious. None of his tragic characters are without humour; even in the tones of despair and deepest affliction there is a certain childishness, *naïveté*, a curious self-contradiction. Frightful as is the storm, the giddiest climax of the play is the scene in the hovel, where King, Fool, and Edgar, who feigns madness, converse—a medley of fools' tongues.

The King in *Hamlet* has many great qualities, though balanced by others that are bad and mean. Yet he is kingly throughout and, though reprobate and wicked, is never insignificant. Treachery is inborn in him, equivocation and faithlessness are the essence of his being; but these are enveloped with the externals of nobility and amiability. He is big, strong, good-looking, and, according to the Ghost, seductive. Hamlet cries him down as vile and detestable behind his back, but is disconcerted and embarrassed in his presence, and never makes good against his opponent all the great words he has repeated to himself in solitude. The usurper is less wholly objectionable, and the murdered king less entirely excellent, than Hamlet represents to his mother. At the King's first appearance we see the full dignity of a monarch in speech and behaviour. He courteously grants the wish of Laertes to return to France, and then speaks with tender friendliness to Hamlet. He is justly angry at the platitudes Hamlet utters, and lectures him like a tutor, but with justice. The two brothers have a striking family

likeness that reappears in Hamlet; they all like to hear themselves talk, and have the gift of speech. They utter observations, maxims, &c.—but most of the persons of the play do the same. This incompleteness, in spite of his talents, prevents Hamlet's character from thriving, and more or less cripples every person in the tragedy.

The King at once sees through Hamlet's feigned madness, and by degrees realizes his own danger, yet remains perfectly master of himself. Through the outbreak of Laertes Shakespeare subtly shows how easy would have been Hamlet's task had he been equally determined. The King appears unalarmed and heroic, and meets Laertes with majestic assurance and dignity. He transfers his anger from himself to Hamlet, and after the treacherous intrigue it is even more important to the King that Laertes should die than Hamlet. In the last scene he appears to put the finishing touch—and to die himself. It is possible that he manœuvred the exchange of rapiers to get rid of Laertes. There was a pause in the fight when rapiers were laid down and their exchange effected. It would account for the cry of Laertes, 'The King's to blame'.

Polonius is not a crafty, half-imbecile old man, but a true statesman, prudent, politic, acute, ready with counsel, cunning when convenient, one who had been valuable to the late king and almost indispensable to the present king. We do not know how much he suspected the death of the elder Hamlet, but we do know that he helped the usurper to the throne, and is now his trusted friend. He is the cunning courtier when conversing with the King about Hamlet and his daughter. We know that Hamlet had no capacity for insisting on his rights, nor for making use of circumstances. His present position at court was his own fault, so that Polonius had double reasons for forbidding further love-meetings. Hamlet was now of no account, and further courting might arouse the King's suspicion; also he was himself certain that Hamlet was out of his mind through love. In *II. ii.* he does not act like a fool, but is palpably distraught and absent-minded, and this makes the scene comic. Alarmed at Ophelia's account of Hamlet's madness, he at once seeks the King, fearful that in his madness he will divulge his passion, and the relations between them can no longer be concealed, so it were better discretion to tell the King. The King is not quite satisfied, so the eavesdropping scene is arranged. This one scene has led actors to represent Polonius as a knavish fool. He is over-officious and short-sighted, and his behaviour is disturbed by a conscience not void of offence.

Ophelia's character is a charming mixture of vanity, coquetry, sensitiveness, love, wit, seriousness, deep distress, and madness. Shakespeare makes plain that the intoxication of passion has already carried her too far with the Prince—and her brother's warning was too late. He delicately leaves this relationship, like many others, a riddle; but this

point of view explains Hamlet's bitterness and her sorrow and madness. An innocent girl could not answer Laertes as she does; but she is more reserved with her father. In this disturbed state of mind, and knowing that there are eavesdroppers, she receives the distracted Prince's visit, and it is not to be wondered at that she appears to him strange and unnatural.

Hamlet's soliloquy, 'To be . . .', has been over-admired, and we do not interpret it like most critics. We question the reference to suicide, for nowhere else has Shakespeare cared to describe or probe into that state of the soul that lets the desire for suicide develop. Lucrece decides upon it amid other circumstances and feelings; Brutus and Cassius think and die as Romans; Othello kills himself without premeditation; and so do Juliet and Romeo. Nowhere is depicted the deliberate suicide. In his first soliloquy Hamlet recalls that God's command is against it. Now that he knows how his father died, and is sworn to revenge him, and is playing a dangerous part, and passionately reproaches himself for lack of decision—shall he, when placed in a position so entirely different, forget the divine command which he once feared to ignore, and, to escape his allotted task, be readier to give up life? If he is thinking of suicide it is obscure and contradictory. But we have heard him asking himself if he is a coward, and now he is still questioning about his revenge. Could suicide be rightly termed 'opposing', and would it avail to 'take arms' for self-destruction? Against his opponent it would: and he could make an end of him successfully, so long as he did not set too high a value on his own life. Who would not bear all he has enumerated when he could get rid of his opponent with a small inconspicuous dagger? 'Enterprises of great pith and moment' cannot possibly refer to suicide.

Hamlet is essentially unheroic, but it would be too derogatory if he could question whether suicide might not be more welcome, and then refrain from fear. Contempt for life, combined with over-excited attachment to it, is a general characteristic of Hamlet, and is a mark of all his humours. In his troubled being all the passions take on a similar appearance—revenge, anger, malice, envy, pride, ambition—all these have a forbidding aspect, but softened by the feeling, wit, taste, culture, and nobility of his personality. It explains why this wonderful personality attracts and holds us, and why repelling passions are not entirely without gloss and greatness. He is a bizarre, impenetrable combination of folly and wisdom, greatness and pettiness of soul, love and hate, vanity and true pride—a lover who displays passion and whom no one can credit with love—one who speaks and feels like a noble friend—the idol of the people—in a certain sense superior to his surroundings, and yet deceived by every one. This mass of contradictions, of heterogeneous elements gathered into one, is the reason of the general delight taken in the play and the character. . . .

Tieck is above all interested in Shakespeare's characters, because

they are individual and natural, like those of real life. A logical strain persists throughout his work, and this is not entirely said in condemnation: although it makes much of his criticism, particularly that on *Hamlet*, appear like criticism from the outside: as if he interpreted the play from the looks of the spectators rather than the hearts of the actors. But it helps us to understand that chance entered less than we thought into *R. and J.*, and that the catastrophe after all is due to the character of the lovers. He also does right to accentuate the complex and discordant elements out of which Shakespeare has wrought his incomparable love-poem. We think that he is wrong about Ophelia, because logical interpretation, for want of facts, must yield to speculation, and his speculative powers are weak. Laertes is an interesting half-way instance, and even if we decide against him in the end, he has stirred up in us such thoughts as to make the inquiry worth while. But his analysis of Hamlet's soliloquy is like an attempt to bend the bow of Odysseus the wrong way. He alines the facts and then decides that according to ordinary laws of association Hamlet could not have contemplated suicide. It is said to be impossible to navigate the Amazon without a skilled pilot because the enormous side-streams are easily mistaken for the main river. We commend this image to Tieck's shade, but it must be added that his is another half-articulate protest at the discrepancy between the incidents of the play and the character of Hamlet.

### III

LUDWIG BOERNE<sup>1</sup> describes Hamlet as the only play which has a Northern ground and a Northern heaven. Shakespeare, in his understanding of nature, knew how to suit his atmosphere to his characters—the blue, sunny South, to the lively and witty, to joy and hasty passion, to the quick, decisive deed—the South where night is only sleeping day; —to the melancholy, brooding, dreaming Hamlet, a land of clouds and long nights, of mists and grey skies, a land where day is only sleepless night. *Hamlet* is not Shakespeare's most admirable work, but Shakespeare is most admirable in *Hamlet*. Its extraordinary force astounds us, when its activity ceases, not when it begins: for the endurance of a force testifies to its greatness. Shakespeare had to step out of himself to create Hamlet, and herein he surpassed himself. Like a colony of his genius it lies under another zone, with another nature, obeying other laws than those of the motherland.

Hamlet is not the central point, it is we who place him there. We must beware the error that prevails in life and on the stage of judging men by their repute. On the stage we believe what the virtuous people say, but we must ourselves observe and judge. Hamlet is less noble and amiable than he appears to Ophelia—and the King less worthless than he appears to Hamlet.<sup>2</sup> Had the King been over-

<sup>1</sup> *Dramaturgische Blätter*, lxviii, 1829.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Tieck.



powered by emotions at the play, he would have left after the dumb show. He withdraws to save himself, but he mistook Hamlet; it did not occur to him that a strong man who had once set his mind upon an act never threatens beforehand. He does not lose his composure when Laertes bursts in upon him at the head of a rabble, nor when Hamlet unexpectedly returns from his sea-voyage—not even when the Queen sinks poisoned—and he himself falls fatally struck.

The Queen is weak, and her share in the crime is doubtful, but the King's masculine art overpowers her. Her son's lamp of conscience, only lighted at midnight, does not burn till morning, and she awakes with the sins of the day before.<sup>1</sup> Ophelia is good and limited as a middle-class girl—the court has not spoilt or refined her. Hamlet had seduced her;<sup>2</sup> and she did not recognize what she had lost until the death of her father made the loss irreparable. The Ghost is not really as lofty a person as described; the family likeness between himself and his son is unmistakable. He is a weak, philosophic ghost, with his home in the air, and he speaks fluently and rhetorically, like a glorified play-actor. He lets his short allowance of time pass unused; instead of beginning with the important matter in hand, his murder, he recounts his torments in hell, and seems to enjoy giving a poetical picture of them. He works up to a regular climax, ending with the greatest horror of all, his murder by a brother. This is a mistake, because the terrible thing about a ghost is that it appears and speaks: what it does and says, however horrible, is childish in comparison. This ghost had not improved his knowledge of men in the other world, or he would hardly have chosen Hamlet to avenge him. Perhaps he wanders into the upper air to seek an avenger, and unfortunately Hamlet, a Sunday-born child, was the only one at court who could communicate with spirits. He urges Horatio and the others to swear silence, but delays what was more important, to enjoin silence on his son. Hamlet prates and babbles, and so balks his father's wishes and his own purpose. The King is killed at last, but not so much condemned as the murderer of his brother as of his nephew.

Hamlet lacks courage of heart, not courage of spirit. He is brave in plans, weak in executing them, and overwhelmingly destructive in his knowledge of himself. To his unhappy weakness he joins knowledge of the same—which discourages him the more. He is a philosopher of death, a scholar of the night. If the nights are dark he is irresolute and immovable—if clear, and only a moon-dial shows him the shadow of the hour, he acts unfittingly, and wanders about in the uncertain light. Life to him is a grave, the world a churchyard, and he appears amiable in this kingdom of which he is lord.<sup>1</sup> Melancholy, distraught, and depressed by death elsewhere, he here is cheerful,

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Horn.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Tieck.

composed, and gives ghostly comfort. He sneers at life as a dream and death as nothing. He is not weak—and who is strong in the presence of death? All ends there—power, worth, esteem, contempt. There, unreprieved, he may forget his father's command to revenge. Shall he, then, drag to the scaffold a criminal lying in the last throes of disease? It were foolish and childishly impatient to kill in the presence of death. His uncle is hateful to him, but would have been so had he not killed his father. The spirit without character faces the character without spirit, and they are opposed. He is bloodless and incapable and awkward in face of the King,<sup>1</sup> and all the scorn and hate that inhabits within him seldom finds word. He would be glad to find his uncle a villain; it would rejoice him to know that his hate had a good cause.

He had suspected before the Ghost's revelation, and now he is beside himself, not because of the murder, but because he is called to revenge it. He is born to suffer, not to do, and is crushed between the sacred bidding of his father and his own nature's strong forbidding. Feigned madness will not help him to gain access to the King, but will make the King more watchful. But Hamlet *is* mad, he does not only pretend. He thinks he is playing with his madness—but it is the madness which plays with him. As soon as he consents to fight with Laertes his heart fails: even the foreboding of a deed makes him ill. Mortally wounded, with no more to lose, and no further need of courage, he slays the King. It is the courage of a thief at the foot of the gallows. Shakespeare was above irony, but there is irony here. He usually solves our doubts, but here he leaves us in heavy thought and painful concern. It is not the upright and the virtuous who go down, but virtue and uprightness themselves. Nature rebels and conquers; the actual moment is lord; the everlasting is overcome by time. In vain our heart warns us not to reverence evil because it is strong, nor despise good because it is weak: we believe our eyes. . . .

Except in the graveyard scene, where he does imbibe something of the true spirit, Boerne omits from Shakespeare a very important thing, viz. his poetry. He writes as if *Hamlet* were a philosophical treatise, and he follows his train of thought to its logical conclusion even more fearlessly than Tieck. He argues with Tieck that Hamlet seduced Ophelia; it does not occur to him that, to such as Hamlet, display of emotion would be an end in itself. But it is in condemning the Ghost as weak and 'philosophic' and verbose that he goes furthest astray. Beauty is one of the causes of awe, and the lines of exceptional beauty in which the Ghost describes his torments produce the effect. Considering the dumb show, something may be said for his suggestion that the King fled the play to save his life; but on the whole the interest of the essay is psychological. It shows in what manner *Hamlet* appeals to a mind in which logic has supplanted poetry.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Tieck.

## IV

TO Eduard Gans<sup>1</sup> *Hamlet* is the tragedy of the nothingness of reflection—or the tragedy of intellect. The intellect appears to be true, yet is untrue; it is the disintegrating power whose attack would make the world go under did not reason turn the negative power to her service and make it the organ of true completeness. On the other hand, intellect is the highest, greatest, and most powerful force that makes man what he is. Contest between intellect and what is substantial and reasonable is the sphere wherein all that is true goes under and is born again. *Hamlet*, therefore, is the profoundest, boldest, most actual tragedy ever written, since its hero succumbs not through human weakness, but human strength: only it is just this strength which is the actual weakness.

The world that lies before Hamlet is quiet and indifferent, and there is no single figure in it who can be moved. Hamlet, therefore, has and dares have no confidant, or the action would cease to be subjective. What by right lodged in his breast alone would take outward shape. He looks upon Horatio as a vent for his humour rather than a confidant,<sup>2</sup> and never seeks his advice. All his followers must have seen the Ghost, but he tells them nothing.

Hamlet does not break his word about revenge, but forgets everything else. He has a revenge all to himself—a purely internal revenge. The satisfaction given to his father is that the earth becomes for him a dead structure, and man the quintessence of dust. This inner revenge appears to be and really is madness. He had no intention to hide his plans under feigned madness and further his action; the madness rather lies in that which draws attention to him and so hinders his action. He abstracts himself from the world, but is continually knocking against it, and herein lies the irony, here represented as the humour of madness, and also cunning and wit of which this humour is capable. When this empty irony against the world is reversed and turned on Hamlet, then herein lies the recovery of madness. While all around are trying to find the cause of the madness, Hamlet, when he comes to himself and ceases to conflict with the world, appears to himself an empty vessel. The climax of this humour is the wish to be freed from the torment and to die, but this revenge on himself remains unfulfilled with other wishes and reflections. In this state of mind the only comfort is doubt of the Ghost's truthfulness—a doubt which honours the intellectual, thoughtful, and self-conscious man. It changes the whole situation and relates everything to justice and judgement. One of the play's profoundest characteristics is the resolve to have certainty through confession—a pretext to save Hamlet in his own eyes, and to elevate the uncertain into certainty

<sup>1</sup> *Vermischte Schriften*, vol. ii, 1834.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Horn.

After the play scene revenge is less entirely subjective, and Hamlet's being is essentially altered. To mad, unconscious humour succeeds fine, conscious irony. He knows what he has to do, and if he delays there are reasons. Before the play inactivity and humour had the character of something outside himself, of madness; now humour becomes a fine mockery, madness a self-conscious melancholy, inactivity a restless activity in seeking reasons for inactivity. He has gone through all stages, and all he has done is to reproach his mother, and cause the deaths of Polonius, Ophelia, Laertes. All this is alien to the chief question of the play, but Hamlet is guiltless of this, and guiltless because *he is*. This is his significance to everything, his deed: to be guiltless and guilty only in that which he does not do. He falls at last a victim to his reflection; the act of eternal justice is performed without him; he is not judge, but executioner. He is a modern Orestes, agonized not by the torment of deed, but by the hell of inactivity. . . .

Gans uses with some effect the external incidents of the play to illustrate Hamlet's character—the contrast of his reproaches to the Queen and the deaths of Polonius and others—and the executioner's rather than the judge's hand that struck down the King. It brings home to us the gulf between thought and act, and the whole criticism is directed to prove the miscarriage of great intellect. Perhaps such abstract reasonings belong to the curiosities rather than the realities of criticism; but it is worth noting that the attentive reader, no matter what his angle, realizes that the events ill fit the character.

## V

HEINRICH HEINE<sup>1</sup> calls Troilus a puppy and Cressida a common bit of calico. The play is neither comedy nor tragedy, but Shakespeare's own and most peculiar creation. An exultant bitterness and world-mocking irony, strange to comedy, prevails in it: as if the tragic goddess were trying to be gay.

The key to Virgilia's character is her silence, and she is a contrast to the Roman she-wolf Volumnia. Shakespeare has depicted the internal strife of ancient Rome with deepest truth. He might be living in present-day London sketching Tories and Radicals disguised as Romans. Ancient Romans and modern Englishmen, and statesmen of both races, greatly resemble one another. They have prosaic hardness, greed, love of blood, unwearying perseverance and firmness of character, and the extreme of unamiableness. The English, like the Roman, nobleman is patriotic, and, despite political-legal differences, united to the plebeian by the bond of love of country. English aristocrats and democrats, like the Romans before them, form a united race—whereas in other countries nobility is bound more to its prince or class.

<sup>1</sup> *Sh.'s Maidens and Women*, 1839 (trans. C. G. Leland, Heinemann, 1891).

Democracy and monarchy are not enemies, for under that incarnate will of the people, as under the majesty of God, blooms the safest human equality, the truest democracy. In *J.C.* the spirit of republicanism speaks directly out with its sharpest traits of character in the proudest aristocrats—a spirit in which is a certain asthmatic close jealousy and dwarfish envy tolerating nothing above itself. Such a spirit was cherished by the English republicans who were Puritans and the Romans who were stoics. Shakespeare sketched Cassius with shrewd sagacity.

Women only follow their inborn nature, and do not necessarily cease to love when they betray; and so Cleopatra loves and betrays at the same time. She is a woman in the blesseddest and cursedest sense of the word. Women are made of too tender material to adjust themselves to life. Cleopatra is at once too good and too bad for this world; her most charming attractions are the cause of her most repulsive frailties. Her actions are based on caprice, and this helter-skelter thought and feeling—the result of an irregular, idle, and troubled life—recalls those spendthrift women whose expensive housekeeping is defrayed by extra-wedlock generosity, and who torment and bless their titular spouses very often with love and fidelity. Her sensuous, wild, and brimstone-yellow wit rather frightens than pleases, and appears more in deeds than words. Her position is droll as her character—for this *Parisienne* of the olden time, this goddess of life, juggled and ruled over Egypt, the stark, silent land of the dead—that narrow Nile strip that looks like a coffin, where, in luxurious villas, mummies are taking their siestas. How witty God is!

The perversion in moral and civic relations which *Titus* displays is already quite Byzantine. Titus, in opposition to his demoralized surroundings, is a real Roman, a relic of the stern and hard old time, a petrified Roman, his fossil virtue become a curiosity. Lavinia also, by her grand feminine dignity, reminds us of the more moral past. She is a contrast to Tamora—though the latter is a fine figure, on whose brow are the marks of a fallen deity, and in whose eyes a world-devouring lust. Shakespeare is pitying and far-seeing, and in the first scene where she appears, he has justified the horrors which she was to inflict on Andronicus. Romantic poetry somewhat ennobles the harlot-like looseness with which she abandons herself to a disgusting negro.

While cherishing an insuperable prejudice against Queen Katharine, one must admit that she has every virtue. History gives no proof that she was cruel, yet the wild pride of her race breaks out on every opportunity where she will vindicate her rank. Despite long-practised Christian humility, she bursts into almost heathen wrath if any one offends the etiquette due to her. Shakespeare presented Henry VIII, the father of his queen, at least fairly and honestly—and the subdued tone makes the shadows more impressive.

Shakespeare translates the old heathenish deities of fate into Christian, so that Macbeth's ruin is not predetermined and unavoidable, but the result of the allurements of hell. He succumbs to Satan, the prime evil. Middleton's witches are more meanly malicious and beggarly than Shakespeare's; they vex the body, but have far less power over the soul.

*Lear* is a more appalling drama than all the horrors of the world of magic and the realm of ghosts; it shows human passion breaking all the bounds of reason and vying with stormy nature. Yet here there is an end to Shakespeare's immense power of will; he is carried away by his own genius more than in *Macbeth* and *Hamlet*. In *Lear* there are no contrasts between the action and nature, but unusual moral events react on so-called soulless nature. A little cloud is already in Lear's intellect; he must be already mad to give all away. Cordelia inclines to be self-willed, and this small spot is a birth-mark from the father. She plays with sad bitterness and delicate irony on the hypocrisy of her sisters.

Love itself, all-defying and conquering, plays the leading part in *R. and J.* Love fears not in the great battle to take refuge with his most terrible yet truest ally, death; and love hand in hand with death is invincible. It has no yesterday and thinks of no to-morrow, but asks only for to-day. In a second love we know that our wildest and noblest feelings will in time be subdued, and this thought is more melancholy than that of death. Though Romeo surrenders himself entirely to this second love he is not without a certain scepticism that appears in ironical expressions like Hamlet's.

As there is something of Hamlet in Romeo, the shadow of Northern earnestness on his glowing mind, so Juliet may be compared with Desdemona. The same Northern element appears in the power of her passion, and she is always self-conscious. Juliet loves and thinks and acts—Desdemona loves, feels, and obeys not her own will, but the stronger impulse. The bad cannot act on her noble nature like the good; she saw Othello's visage in his soul, and this white face of the soul wrought on her heart. Has Shakespeare returned to and solved the problem of his first tragedy, *Titus*—the love of a fair lady for a negro? It causes a gloomy grieving to think that Iago, with his evil comments on the love of Desdemona for the Moor, may not be all in the wrong. Most repulsive of all are Othello's remarks on the damp hand of his wife.

The spirit of the wide world possessed Shakespeare rather than his own will, and made him justify in Shylock an unfortunate sect inscrutably oppressed by Providence. Shakespeare's genius rises above sect; he shows us neither Jews nor Christians, but oppressors and oppressed, and the madly agonized cries of exultation of the latter when they can repay their arrears of injuries with interest. Shylock is a man

whom nature bids hate his enemies: as Antonio and his friends are not exemplars of the divine doctrine to love one's enemies. The play might have been a satire on Christianity, since Shylock's enemies are hardly worthy to unlace his shoes. The bankrupt Antonio is a weak creature, without energy or hatred, and with little of love. Franz Horn remarked that Antonio's friends might easily have raised the needed sum—and Shylock was right to despise such friends. Except Portia, Shylock is the most respectable person in the piece. He does not conceal his love of money, but, more than money, he loves just retribution for unspeakable insults. Though he curses his daughter he loves her more than his ducats and jewels. Excluded from public life and Christian society, and forced into the narrow consolation of domestic happiness, only family feelings remain to him, and he expresses them with touching tenderness. Jessica has no feelings, only love of what is remarkable and romantic. She depicts no typical Jewess, but simply a daughter of Eve.

Compared with the art-detesting representative of Judea, Portia embodies the Renaissance spirit—the after-blossoming of the Greek spirit. She is also the type of gay prosperity, in antithesis to the gloomy adversity of Shylock. As the people, so their homes: in Belmont all is light and music. . . .

Heine's criticism is that of a poet, whose emotional force is stronger than his self-control, and who thus reveals more of himself than does the ordinary conventional critic. He recalls Swinburne in that he is impatient of fools and uses strong language. He does not merely receive and explain impressions; he swoops down on them and carries them off to his own nest; or rather, he makes the tour of his little globe of experience with them and then returns them to earth. Mixed with the emotional fervour, which is his own, is something of the logic of his race. We naturally ask whether this power to transmute feeling helps us to understand Shakespeare better, or whether the explanation is too self-coloured to recall its origin.

We do not hesitate to say that, with *A. and C.*, eloquent though his words are about 'Egypt, the stark, silent land of the dead', &c., and, with *Titus*, where he speaks of 'Byzantine perversion' and 'petrified Roman', he has overleapt himself and fallen on the other side of Shakespeare. He takes *Titus* too seriously, and even dares to compare Tamora and Desdemona. It is the mark of an irritable impulsive mind, bursting into emotion on its own account, at the mere remembrance of the former Shakespearian touch. He is naturally a fine interpreter of *R. and J.*, but we must give a divided verdict on the *Merchant*. He brings home to us Shylock's greatness, but is less than just to Antonio. Though the point which he quotes from Horn is a true one, that Antonio's friends might have raised the money, he succumbs to the prosiness of much German criticism that cannot distinguish between

fact and poetry. The creative impulse of the *Merchant* is strong enough to make the reader forget the worldly details of the story. It is when this impulse weakens, as with Falstaff in *2 Henry IV*, as Mr. Middleton Murry will point out, that the details make their presence felt.

## VI

OTTO LUDWIG<sup>1</sup> refers Hamlet's advice to the players to Shakespeare himself. Degree of passionate outburst, though contrary to natural impulse, gives calmness, breadth, and clearness. The impression is not lessened, but becomes more convincing, and passion moves not too swiftly to prevent our comprehension and sympathy keeping pace with it. The incomprehensible becomes apparently comprehensible, and what passion loses in spontaneity it gains in emphasis.

What tragedy introduced into comedy did for Molière, comedy introduced into tragedy did for Shakespeare: it mingled the real and commonplace with poetry. Like Molière Shakespeare had one central figure in his plays, but unlike Molière he gave it personality. He was fond of placing two or more characters in the same situation, or two series of events side by side. The contrast in behaviour is humanly interesting, and ethically significant from the respective final issues: e.g., Lear and Gloster, Hamlet and Laertes, Timon and Apemantus, Orsino and Malvolio, Macbeth and Banquo, Brutus and Cassius, Antonio and Shylock, Othello and Iago. In all cases, at least in tragedy, both go too far. Shakespeare never comes to grief on the rock of his finished characters. He individualizes and idealizes everything by exalting and strengthening. Each play has its own lighter or gloomier atmosphere, and each scene its own peculiar tone. The art is wonderful that in all possible ways quickens the imagination, as well as the mind, for the boldest happenings. So does the feeling, implicit in the various scenes, set the tune of the whole play; we have sense of a kind of nexus of causality that influences the imagination and prepares our mental acceptance of the worst of relentless fate. Feeling at its height mingles anguish of mind and pleasure of imagination, and so half the weight is ceded to buoyant imagination and the mind does not succumb. Every expansion of feeling carries with it the inner sense of the experience and lesson of real life. Though Shakespeare's head is in the heavens, his feet are firmly planted on earth.

No figure is ever entirely transformed into passion: the balance of nature at moments is at least partially restored. Constrained by outward circumstances, the passion may even appear forgotten—e.g. Hamlet, on the players' first entry, and his later self-contempt. It is noticeable in casual remarks occasioned by the speaker's situation. These are often like a commentary on what is going on psychologically,

<sup>1</sup> *Sh. Studien*, 1840-51.



revelations of the author's intentions. They often palpably contradict the predominating passions, but this is the way of passion. A man may be consumed with it, and yet think and speak reasonably of things that have nothing to do with it, but all the while be under its spell. In this momentary freedom come flashes of humour, laughter with tears, and, vice versa, self-scorn, self-derision, self-pity at our freedom and our bondage. We see both sides of Shakespeare's characters, so they are convincing, substantial, and imposing in their plastic calm.

Compare the dialogue in Schiller and Shakespeare, and we see that Shakespeare never outsoars the world represented upon his stage. His conversation is concerned with the events of the hour, and gathers interest from them. These are painted with all the attraction that soul and mind can give to words. Shakespeare is the poet, Schiller the philosopher.

Coriolanus is Shakespeare's one character to turn back; the others rush straight ahead from some one point to a happy medium, then on to the extravagance which is their doom. In a way they are moral warnings of a danger lurking in the individual character, quickened into activity by some external influence, that rises and without pause, with ever-increasing rapidity, drives him to self-destruction. . . .

These abstractions do not help us to appreciate Shakespeare, but they have a historic interest. To Ludwig Shakespeare is above all a poet, keeping his philosophy within the bounds of art. He comments upon his use of contrast, his power to individualize characters, and his perfect balance between the real and ideal world. It is a relief to meet with concrete instances—to hear the names of characters, but the contrasts between such characters as Lear and Gloster, Orsino and Malvolio, &c., are too wide to instruct.

## VII

HEINRICH THEODOR RÖTSCHER<sup>1</sup> sets out on the problem of Hamlet by dividing the theorizing from the practical world. To theorize only means individual freedom, to act, limitation of freedom; and a summons to act grows more insistent with the growing consciousness of the condition of the world and one's place in it. If it appears immoral we are troubled at the contrast between our contemplative outlook and actuality. We desire to make it conform to our ideal, but if we also desire to be perfectly pure in action we are doomed to inactivity. This was Hamlet's position, for he wished to reconcile the two. He had revered his mother, and was now deeply wounded by her conduct, and therefore felt bitterly towards the whole sex. The Ghost confirms his dim suspicions; he determines to end the evil state of affairs, and is faced by the one necessity—to act.

<sup>1</sup> *Cyclus dramatischer Charaktere*, 1844.

Man's guilt lies in seeing the need of action and remaining thought-bound. If the deed is avoided the spirit remains without actual power, and there is no unity of thought and being. Hamlet is the great typical character, who individualizes the whole theorizing consciousness which cannot bring itself to forsake the wide spaces of thought for the restriction of action, that loses itself in boundless reflection, and, refusing to act till it is assured of absolute purity of action and consequences, is condemned to inactivity. He is supremely ideal, with tenderest feeling for all that is noble and great, the confirmed enemy of the low and common. He has delicate power of creative imagination, profound knowledge of men, and is a philosopher; yet he cannot move in a world waiting for action, and so finally he gets no glory for action, since this is due only to the action born of free decision and independent will. He meets with the hardest lot to a proud spirit—he is used as the instrument only for the accomplishment of his aim.

The King, though inferior-minded, knows his own mind, and his decision gives him the upper hand. Hamlet's first monologue reveals the whole man—tragic tumult of soul—bitterness, scorn—a noble nature wounded in its most sacred attachments. When the Ghost appears his melancholy flies and he is given demoniacal strength. It is the only scene where actuality acts upon him, and he works himself up to heroism and rises above himself. But the Ghost disappears, and his reflection involuntarily dulls the thought of revenge. One bent on action would not need to acquaint himself of his intention or explain his attitude of mind, or exhort his friends to keep silence. The idea of assumed madness already indicates inner disorder. Hence, often involuntarily in this feigned madness his idealism of conception finds voice: as, 'There's nothing good or bad . . .'. And the speech, 'What a piece of work is man . . .', ends ironically, because of his lack of inner harmony—a gulf between thought and action which he cannot bridge. No self-accusation alters his disposition—only action can set him free.

His temper put into words is, 'To be or not to be'. Despite Tieck, it is a web of argument on suicide. His first monologue was merely an exclamation of trouble from pressure of his position and foreboding of evil: the task of revenge had not been laid upon him. Now, aware of cowardice, he had returned to melancholy that was not vague, but the result of experience of his own nature. The sense of dislocation in this leads him to thoughts of suicide. But suicide is an act that requires the breaking of all reflection, so he continues to think till action is brought to naught.

The killing of Polonius sheds ironic light on his attitude. His carefully worked-out reflections have come to nothing, and by a sudden *volte-face* actuality gets the better of thought. It shows how little reflection was any real preparation for action. Gradually, above the feeling that all is hollow and negative and mortal, rises the certainty of

an all-guiding Providence. This again deters from action, since Providence needs no active help from the individual. The individual, therefore, should not take upon himself the responsibility of action. Providence commands us to act, and leave revenge to Him; so Hamlet shelters behind a new sophistical self-deception. Yet he cannot stifle entirely the consciousness of the task allotted to him, therefore—moved by the example of Fortinbras—he again bewails his weakness.

The cause of his mood in the churchyard—that death levels all—is occasioned by his rescue from the fate designed for him by the King. Those who were conveying him to his fate are now become the victims. That Providence guards him is now an experience, not a speculation. As his reliance on Providence grows, the last dregs of energy dissolve. What is to be will be: and this is the final stage in the evolution of Hamlet's character. Discord between will and action is silenced, and he no longer feels the sting of inaction. In the end the results of reflection are annihilated, and tame resignation and trust in Providence blown to the winds by Laertes' crime. Passion accomplishes revenge, but Hamlet fulfils the command of circumstances rather as a blind tool than self-conscious spirit. The consummation of tragic irony is that the ideal is wrecked against the real. But the moral spirit is satisfied; the moral idea has swallowed up all that sinned against it, leaving no one a hero.

Octavius (*A. and C.*) awakes neither moral respect nor admiration for any great qualities; but Antony's great qualities lack moral connexion, and exercise no enduring influence, since there is no unity of spirit and character. Even his finest traits are only flashes that momentarily illuminate the inner disconnexion. In the same way Cleopatra mingles disparate traits, and calls forth all the contradictory elements of his nature. Neither are characterless, but rather made up of great and contemptible, attractive and repulsive, qualities, with no shaping mind, no strength to mould them into firm, independent character. The epithets 'enchantress', 'basilisk', 'serpent of old Nile', applied to Cleopatra, betray the impression of her uncanny power. We feel no displeasure, because she is so much more the victim of the whirlpool of contending powers than a responsible being. Her glowing passion is balanced by desire for mastery, and, above all, she longs to subdue warlike men and imperious natures, and exercise on them her sportive humours. It prevented her from sinking into sensual pleasure, and counterbalanced the weight of voluptuousness. She alternately attracts and overthrows Antony; she makes him an instrument which responds to her touch, only to overpower him again with intoxicating delight. The key to her being is this anarchy of conflicting passions, but she is a truly living individuality, not an impossible creature. Nothing is more difficult than to depict such a heterogeneous mingling of traits as a real personality.

Her glowing Eastern imagination pictures everything on a monstrous scale. What imagination seizes becomes of exclusive interest for the moment. No settled aim overrules her whole being; she never pauses or collects herself, but is the prey of the instant. In the momentary excitement which seizes her lies her enchainning power. The volcanic nature of her whole being outsteps all our criticism. The power she exercises is the just claim of her nature; her doom the restlessness and torment of untamed natural disposition. Her death reconciles us to her life by her heroism, as by beauty of imagination that adorns the suicide. She is proudly conscious of beauty and power, and almost childishly jealous and meanly envious. She can melt into sweetest tenderness and be of the noblest, while side by side with these is an abyss of falsity and infidelity. Coaxing playfulness and teasing grace cover depths of passion as with flowers, till suddenly the volcano erupts to make all around tremble. With all her feeling she is capable of sly reckoning; she is overpowered by the danger of the moment even to senselessness, yet she defies all horror of death, and dies with the composure of a heroine. Such a character could not fully display itself in a static development of pathos, but requires variety of situations.

Constance (*John*), through her gigantic passion, is a contrast to the cold egoism around her; but this passion carries within it the germ of her destruction. It is not wholly morally justifiable, so she falls to the ground. She succumbs as the result of extreme pitch of excitement arising from self-seeking. She becomes tragic because her feelings are a mingling of right and wrong. We do not regret her disappearance, since she has thwarted every peaceful political development, but she wins lively sympathy by intensity of feeling growing to gigantic dimensions. For the interest of the common weal we wish that she may not get into power.

Cordelia sees through her hypocritical sisters and falls back on sparse and wounding coldness of expression. She proves that even the soundest minded, living amid moral corruption, may become partially distorted in judgement. Ordinary moral rectitude becomes narrowed to the concentrated aim of keeping the individual self spotless and preserving truth at any price: spontaneous morality becomes chilled by reasoning. Cordelia is a victim of circumstance—of a world divested of truth and morality—and the ruinous effect of such immoral conditions is that even the purest natures become unbalanced. At the head of an invading force, it is only right that she dies;<sup>1</sup> in her death we see the law of the world order. The higher claim of the State requires that she should die.

Falconbridge (*John*), on his father's side, inherits courage and other knightly qualities, while on his mother's side he belongs to the people and represents the sound moral element of the nation, and as such he

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Ulrici and Gervinus.

despises the selfish policy of king and nobles, and sets the nation's independence above everything. The truthfulness of his life proves that the world, however diseased, has an indestructible power of recovery. Genuine child of nature, he willingly gives in return for nature's dowry the inheritance which legitimate birth would have secured him. War expands his soul, and gives him means to prove his knightly inheritance by deeds. As soon as he takes an active part in events his humour subsides, and we see true seriousness and reserved depth of character. He is like a chorus looking on and judging, or the spirit of history with its verdict on conditions brought about by the guilt of the sovereign and nobility; but we feel that where such clear sight and mind exist among the people, even deadly disease can be overcome. The final security for the rehabilitation of the nation is the qualities of its people—poetically expressed in *Falconbridge*. . . .

At first sight Rötischer appears to be merely a safe critic, one who never loses sight of Shakespeare in rapt meditation, and takes no risks. He is interested in morals, and tries his impressions by the world's agreed moral standard. But as we read on we become aware that he has made Shakespeare's characters live again for us, even if but for a moment. He proves to us that they evolve—that Hamlet's words on Providence are the result of the events of the play—that Cleopatra's beauty covers a volcano: it is less her fearless death that brings this home than her assault on the messenger, which makes us glimpse the infernal quality of her rage. Of the last three characters we have but briefly remade his criticisms. Constance and *Falconbridge* are capable of such moral interpretation, but not Cordelia—and we tremble to see him toying with the electric chain.

## VIII

ACCORDING to Klein<sup>1</sup> the tragic ground of *Hamlet* is the crime done in sleep and hidden from any eye-witness or possibility of discovery. Hamlet is assured of the unwitnessed crime and suffers suspicion born of filial love—'O my prophetic soul!' There is no other conviction but the inner psychological one of his keen spirit. Revenge is impossible, for it lacks that which would justify it before God and the world, and to all reason—material proof. The centre of gravity of conscience is shifted; it is in the one called to revenge the crime, not, as in other tragedies, in the criminal himself. This is the phantom-like point of the tragedy, and one of the directly terrible consequences of the murder: the all-paralysing crime paralyses the punishment.

Should not the inner certainty, reflected in the Ghost for popular satisfaction, suffice for the son's revenge? Not unless all Denmark is

<sup>1</sup> *Berliner Modenspiegel*, no. 24, 1846.

to look upon him as a mad homicide, a parricide, a lunatic ghost-seer—he, the sound thinker, the fine mind, the enlightened spirit, the elegant knightly prince of penetrating understanding. In the nature of the crime lies the riddle; its character is the cause of Hamlet's apparent lack of energy and brooding self-torment. Shakespeare proves here, as he has proved elsewhere in a different manner, that punishment is only fully developed crime, the necessary consequence of voluntary mis-doing. He must establish his theory, even when there is no outward proof, that evil deeds, though hidden beneath the earth, betray themselves. This is the fundamental idea that explains Hamlet.

The tragic action is the violent struggle between the divining spirit and the fact. His supposed weakness is like the pathos in ancient tragedy—tempestuous struggle of spirit against pressure of an imposed atonement. In most of Shakespeare's tragedies the crime takes place in the play; here, as in ancient tragedy, we only hear of it. Another link with the ancients is that the hero lies under the burden of the sin of one of his family. But the tragedy is incomparably deeper, since Hamlet fights in suffering against the undiscovered crime. At last he corners the crime, and the hidden guilt discloses itself as a repetition of itself in the poisoned rapier. It is a spiritual combat of divination and secret guilt. The power of the spirit is like a lever that forces the secret into light. The unrest which cannot calm itself by outward action is the heroism of the tragedy, the true, philosophic, fully capable thinker its necessary hero, and the consuming despair of his brooding mind, apparently so effectless, his triumph. This spiritual striving at last drives the crime from its hiding-hole. Secrecy struggles with secrecy, inner conviction with a deed that knows itself secure, a mental ascertaining power with a deed apparently beyond the region of fact. . . .

Klein meditates over the inward struggle till he connects the mysterious nature of the crime with the quality of Hamlet's despair. The interest of the criticism lies in his conviction that the crime must come to light. It hints at the modern theory, most capably developed by Professor Bradley, that evil is an alien presence in Shakespeare's world. Klein also skilfully conveys that Hamlet's great gifts of intellect and personality intensified the struggle.

## IX

IN this last quarter of a century the most outstanding general remarks on Shakespeare are Horn's, that he knew everything—Boerne's, that he was royally minded—Heine's, that he had immense power of will—Rötscher's, that he was a prophet.

On the subject of character and morality nearly all the critics are agreed. Horn speaks of his everlastingly fine characterization and infallible character pictures; Tieck, of the naturalness of his characters, free from insipid idealism, and their truth to life; Heine and Ludwig, of

their convincing reality. The latter calls his characters moral warnings, while Horn mentions his cosmic justice—Heine, his strict impartiality, and wide-world spirit stronger than his own will—and Rötcher, the moral element throughout his work. Klein would endorse the last view—considering his theory of *Hamlet*—that evil will out.

Tributes to his art come from Horn, from Boerne, who notes his skilful use of atmosphere, and from Heine and Ludwig: the last two discover his use of contrast.

Like their predecessors, Horn, Tieck, and Heine insist on his reality and truth to nature. Boerne calls *Hamlet* a Christian tragedy, while to Heine, as to Goethe before him, Shakespeare was above sect. Against Goethe, however, and in agreement with the Schlegels, Heine calls his poetry romantic. . . .

Shakespeare is here celebrated as prophet, philosopher, moralist, &c., but little as artist. The metaphysical strain persists: the thought of a world beyond the tangible one, in which Shakespeare's spirit planes.

## Chapter XII

### ENGLAND 1841-1848

I. CARLYLE. II. EMERSON. III. HUNTER. IV. DAWSON. V. RAY. VI. VERPLANCK. VII. FLETCHER. VIII. CAMPBELL. IX. CONCLUSION.

#### I

SHAKESPEARE, says Carlyle,<sup>1</sup> gives the outer life of Europe, the Practice or Body, where Dante gives the Faith or Soul. He was so complete and self-sufficing that probably we should not have heard of him but for the prosecution. The greatest intellect that has left literary record, with a faculty of understanding equal to Bacon's in constructing his dramas—so perfect is the result, as if done by nature out of such poor materials. The test of intellect is how a man constructs a narrative, and discerns the relative importance of circumstances: for he must first *understand* the thing. To Shakespeare the object revealed its inmost heart and generic secret; it is reflected in a *level* mirror great as the world, not the convexities of self. He has the seeing-eye to discern nature's musical idea, often in rough embodiments. It is the poet's first gift, bestowed only by nature, to *see* the inner harmony without which nothing could exist. Superiority of intellect is Shakespeare's faculty, and it includes all, for faculties are not distinct, but man's spiritual nature, including his morality, is one and indivisible. Without morality intellect were impossible, for to know a thing you must first love it. Shakespeare's intellect is still greater because unconscious; it is part of nature, and his works grow up like the oak with the symmetry of nature's laws. He is greater than Dante in that he fought truly and did conquer. He, too, knew deep sorrows, and yet he exaggerates only in mirthfulness and love of laughter. Of the man we get no full impress in his work, for he wrote under conditions for the Globe Playhouse. Indifferent to creeds, he was no sceptic, but greater for being *conscious* of no heavenly message: all that Mahomet was conscious of was error. This Stratford peasant is the grandest thing we have done, and we would give up our Indian Empire rather than him. . . .

Carlyle's lecture belongs to the time when he was growing interested in life rather than literature. He is less concerned with what Shakespeare did than with what he was. One feels that he turns to the past to contemplate a great unconscious, universal soul, as an antithesis to the so-called great man of the present. Shakespeare is for him God's gift of a beautiful soul to our troubled world. It is characteristic of his era that for him the greatest poet is the most moral man. No doubt this is an aesthetic heresy, but at the present day it is less fiercely denounced

<sup>1</sup> *Heroes*, 1841.



than a few years ago. His remarks on Shakespeare's constructive power are on the highest critical plane, and should be remembered in any discussion of Shakespeare's art. What he says about Shakespeare the man and the Globe Playhouse has the agnostic manner, which is the best to assume when approaching the subject. But on the whole the greatest Shakespearian critics are those who have succeeded in 'universalizing' some part of their minds—if the phrase be permitted; and Carlyle is of the number—that part of his mind which he has universalized, being the moral-literary. Also, like all men of genius, as opposed to talent, he criticizes with his soul rather than his intellect, as if he had felt Shakespeare's soul pass him in the revolution of worlds.

## II

R. W. EMERSON<sup>1</sup> affirms that range and extent more than originality distinguish great men. The greatest genius is the most indebted man. A master finds his materials collected, and his power lies in sympathy with his people and love of the materials he works in. What an economy of power, and compensation for life's shortness! The theatre of Shakespeare's day stood for the newspaper of the present. The public mind possessed the stage; the poet therefore need lose no time in idle experiments. He needs a ground in popular tradition on which to work, and within which to restrain his art. But in furnishing so much work done to his hand it leaves him at leisure to use his imagination. Shakespeare owed debts on all sides and could use whatever he found. *Henry VIII* was only partly his; but the first play was the work of a man with a vicious ear, who constructed his lines on a given tune; whereas the thought in Shakespeare constructs the tune, so that reading for the sense brings out the rhythm. The best things are not done by the individual, but by wide social labour when a thousand share the same impulse, e.g. the English Bible, and the translation of Plutarch which is excellent because it is translation of translation.

Since the age of Pericles there has been no such society as Shakespeare's, yet their genius failed to find out the best head in the universe. Now all literature is Shakespearianized, and his mind is the horizon beyond which we do not see. No researches can tell us anything about the sources of his poetry. As for his life, he is his own best biographer, and even he can tell nothing, except to the Shakespeare in us. Read one of the antique documents laboriously compared by his commentators, and then read one of his skyey sentences—like an aerolite fallen out of heaven—and say whether they match, or which gives the most historical insight into the man. We have his recorded convictions on every subject; and in the Sonnets he reveals under masks that are no masks to the intelligent the lore of friendship and love. In

his ample pictures of the gentlemen and the king we see the forms and humanities that pleased him—his delight in troops of friends, in large hospitality, in cheerful giving. Timon, Warwick, Antonio the merchant answer for his great heart. He is not the least but the best known person in modern history. His dramatic method is unquestioned, but secondary; he was a full man who liked to talk and pour out his wisdom of life.

Out of his imaginative and lyric power he created characters like living persons, and his omnipresent humanity co-ordinated all his faculties. Give a man of talents a story to tell, and his partiality will appear: but Shakespeare is strong like nature, with no peculiarity or discoverable egotism. Like the typical poet he transfers the inmost truth of things to music and verse, and proves metaphysically that things can be translated into song. A cultured man may write well, but his personal history shows through, so the sense remains prosaic: in the poet's mind the fact is swallowed up in the new element of thought. Shakespeare, Homer, Dante, Chaucer saw the meaning—the second and finer harvest—of the visible world—that it is an emblem of the thoughts of the mind—that its natural history is a mute commentary on human life. He rested in its beauty and did not try to explore the virtue of its symbols. Other men saw the same objects—and their beauty vanished. They read into them commandments, all-excluding duties, that turned life into a joyless pilgrim's progress. . . .

We may balance Emerson's saying, that Shakespeare transfers the inmost truth of things to music and verse, against Carlyle's, that he discerned nature's musical idea, the inner harmony without which nothing could exist. The two have much in common, including the moral-aesthetic bias: for it is Emerson's opinion that Shakespeare had all the qualities of his good characters. The modern world refuses to travel along this broad highway to Shakespeare the man; it recognizes the imaginative world as a discrete reality which may or may not interact with the material world. Emerson has at least stated eloquently and persuasively the reasons why an author's works may be his best biography; and his appreciation of Shakespeare's all-transmuting poetic power leads him after all to recognize that independent world of the imagination which his former assertion would seem to contradict. A recent critical work reminds us that knowledge supplies what the artist fails to express: the untransmuted poetical activity in the early poems of Shelley and Byron can be interpreted by knowledge of their lives, but we do not need it for *Prometheus* or *Beppo*.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, Emerson's discovery that the visible world is an emblem of the thoughts of the mind anticipates that of modern critics.<sup>2</sup> And in proving Shake-

<sup>1</sup> *The Romantic Theory of Poetry*, by A. E. Powell (1926), p. 243.

<sup>2</sup> Mr. T. S. Eliot and Mr. J. Middleton Murry say that every mental process has

speare's universality by way of his anti-moralizing habit he partly anticipates Mr. Lascelles Abercrombie, who explains that the poetry of Shelley and Leopardi is less great than Shakespeare's, because 'to focus the whole range of life into shapely coherence they had to employ a certain limited definiteness of idea', whereas Shakespeare 'can achieve as harmonious a result with less selection'.<sup>1</sup>

Like Carlyle, De Quincey, and a few others, Emerson is a critic of genius in whom past and present meet, and whose intuition discloses to him permanent truths.

### III

NOW that we are well launched on the tide of Shakespearian criticism it may appear strange to dwell on books like that of Joseph Hunter<sup>2</sup> which recall eighteenth-century methods. He is one of the unimaginative critics who judges Shakespeare by the laws of conventional life and morals, but his book has a certain historical interest, and we therefore select a few of his judgements. The plot of *M. for M.*, he says, is improbable and disgusting, and the principal characters are unindividualized. We hate Shylock not because he is a Jew, but because he is an oppressive creditor. Portia's name is ill chosen because it suggests the severe Roman matron and further heightens the unfeminine nature of her part. The plea for mercy meant more in Shakespeare's day than ours, when the monarch had absolute power over the fate of the accused. In *Twelfth-Night* we have his grand attack on Puritans; Malvolio is one of the most finished characters in drama. The historical plays are praised because they present history faithfully, and in *John* we see the darkest parts of the Popish system exposed to the people's execration. Buckingham's fall in *Richard III* is a lesson to the young not to lend themselves for evil purposes to a wily companion. Scene iii of Act III in *T. and C.* surpasses most things in Shakespeare; it reflects the methods of Walsingham who had a secret intelligence-system to arrest traitors, but amazed the public by an appearance of almost divine intuition. It would please us to know that *R. and J.* was a real story; we would enjoy it more were we certain that these affecting incidents were the actual experience of beings like ourselves. *Macbeth*, like the *Tempest*, would be better if longer; it is a mere draft that should be retouched. Banquo's murder sounds incredible, because such negotiations with assassins have become unknown to us. *Hamlet* shows different manners and work done and resumed at intervals; and this, perhaps, is the cause of the difficulty in deciding

its equivalent in the world of sense. According to Mr. Eliot *Hamlet* remains obscure because Sh. found nothing in the outer world corresponding with the hero's disgust at his mother's conduct.

<sup>1</sup> *The Idea of Great Poetry* (1925), pp. 98-9.

<sup>2</sup> *New Illustrations of Sh.*, 1845.

what Hamlet's real character is. Had Shakespeare proceeded continuously with his first design he might have produced the most magnificent tragedy in the world. The scruple for which Hamlet spares the King is absolutely shocking. The incident of the cliff in *Lear* is so extravagantly improbable that we need not defend it. *Othello* has unity of design, and nearest approaches to what tragedy should be: the rest of Shakespeare's so-called tragedies are noble compositions, but more histories than tragedies. . . .

What was said above absolves us from commenting further on these critical remarks, but we will note that his strictures on *Hamlet* have been significantly endorsed by later writers. Hunter speaks of additions and changes and lack of settled project, which may explain the difficulty of the hero's mind. He has felt dimly the discrepancy which the modern critic, who has explored the sources, knows to exist between the incidents of the story and the psychological interest which Shakespeare added in rewriting. Hunter is also distressed, like Dr. Johnson and others, at the scruple for which Hamlet spares the King; and he compares it to Macduff's saying, 'He has no children'. Did such exist, he thinks Macduff would have executed retributive vengeance on them—and he calls the thought unworthy of Shakespeare.

#### IV

GEORGE DAWSON<sup>1</sup> has good general ideas, but does not always apply them happily. He does well to say that Shakespeare is the mirror of things as they are; that he re-creates the soul of man as God has created it; that he gives the impersonal laws of the world, not poetic justice. But in appreciating *Hamlet* he stumbles at Ophelia's character. He describes her as a type of the Germanic woman interesting from neutrality. He is right that her softness made her tragic fate more tragic, and also that, in depicting madness, Shakespeare anticipated the conclusions of science. But then, to prove Shakespeare's impartial wisdom, he explains that her songs were the result of an amorous nature which she had concealed in health. He remarks well of the King that he shows the difference between wishing and willing, and the folly of motive-mongering while the individual self remains. Also, that in the grave-digger scene we see how the laws of the construction of the world differ from any small laws of ours; and that to watch the grave-digger is to know how little way tragedy extends.

His subtlest criticism is about Shakespeare's songs, which, he says, help to develop the character to whom they are given and to interpret the drama: e.g. Desdemona's willow-song. Shakespeare surpasses all in blending the dramatic and lyric art. He so mingles them that the lyric explains, sustains, and illustrates the character.

<sup>1</sup> *Sh. and Other Lectures*, 1846.

ISAAC RAY'S<sup>1</sup> treatise interests where he succeeds in proving that Shakespeare has used madness in his characters to unfold deep truths of mental science. Shakespeare, to him, reveals the master mind by perceiving the numberless shades of distinction in a character, so that with all its aberrations the insane bears the impress of the sane, each in harmony with the other. Intuition was not his only guide, but, like the comparative anatomist of to-day who reconstructs a skeleton from the smallest bone, from a single trait of mental disease he inferred many others.

Lear does not lose all trace of his original qualities, nor cease to command our respect. The early stages of his madness—his rash distribution of the kingdom—are mere exaggeration of natural peculiarities. The deep moral interest is that Lear's case is often paralleled. The scene on the heath between Lear, Edgar, and the Fool is like a new chapter in the history of mental disease. The raving of maniacs need not be entirely unconnected, but obeys the law of association. Cerebral excitement revives ancient and long-forgotten impressions so vividly that they appear to be outward realities; and the diseased intellect cannot correct the error of perception. Also the maniac expresses all and cannot select; and any person who utters every thought that arises in his mind appears to be either a fool or a madman. It occurs in almost every form of insanity, conclusively proves mental disease, and enables us to distinguish the real from the assumed. The contrast of Edgar's feigning is the severest test, and we are left with no doubt of Shakespeare's views of genuine insanity. Edgar wishes to deceive the multitude, not the professional student, and he naturally overacts. Here Shakespeare's philosophical discrimination shows the highest order of genius.

Hamlet's insanity is not feigned, but the most faithful delineation of a disordered mind ever made by man. It is said to be assumed to conceal his plans, yet at once it excites the King's fears and leads to his banishment. He has the perverted moral affections, the solemn earnestness in maintaining his delusions, the concatenation of thoughts peculiar to the insane—all beyond the power of the simulator. Madness need not be confusion and violence, but is compatible with some of the ripest and richest manifestations of the intellect. The pathological element amid his motives and impulses darkens his affections. Against Goethe's criticism we can say that he shows no over-refined feeling to Ophelia, nor a tender conscience to his old friends; but if we assume him mad there is no difficulty. On the merest whim he postpones acting, and it is the nature of insanity to talk but not to act, to resolve but not to execute. He is a man of warm affections, refined

<sup>1</sup> *Contributions to Mental Pathology*, 1847.

tastes, a quick sense of honour, and a high order of intellect. The symptoms of disease blend so intimately with these traits of character that we cannot easily separate them. If he talks lightly to the Ghost after the first interview, it is because his mind is reeling under the first stroke of disease. It is also characteristic of the insane to take pleasure in ridiculing those they dislike. He would not have ridiculed Ophelia's father had he been feigning; and he might well have tried to convince Rosencrantz and Guildenstern that he was mad. The nunnery scene shows how insanity changes the heart's warmest affections. He passes rapidly from calm and courtesy to a storm of contending feelings. All who are familiar with the insane know that this is characteristic. It would be beyond the power of mimicry to violate his affections and trample upon his idol. At the grave it is madness of the purest kind—passion without end or aim, and insufficiently provoked. But the apology to Laertes proves that the disease is in an early stage, when calm periods succeed paroxysms of fury—for a madman most rarely admits his own insanity. Imposture, though justified by the end, would have compromised the worth and dignity of such a character. Hamlet is the example of a noble spirit, staggering under the weight of a great responsibility, with powers crippled by disease: a spectacle worthy of men and gods. Other poets use madness to vary the action of the play, or excite vulgar curiosity. Shakespeare, by its means, unfolds many a deep truth of mental science. Few, however versed in the subject, would fail to learn something from the study of Shakespeare.

In Macbeth we see the real displaced by the imaginary—impressions made objective by the morbidly excited brain, and the outward becomes the mere shadow of the inward. Macbeth's whole being is absorbed by the wish to become king, and he has revolved the means to accomplish his purpose so often that finally the instrument for effecting his purpose becomes visible to him. Banquo's ghost should be subjective, because it proves the power of conscious guilt on an over-active mind. Lady Macbeth is depraved enough to commit a great crime, but lacks the nervous hardihood to sustain the shock. Shakespeare's feat is to observe through following scenes the method of madness, to make its phases consistent each with each, while preserving the individual character, and also appealing to imagination and poetry. Lear on his throne is the same as Lear in the hovel with the Fool and Edgar. This is the work of the highest order of genius, and Shakespeare's knowledge was most due to his extraordinary power of observation. . . .

This work of a specialist heightens our belief in Shakespeare's psychological power—in the genius that could perceive intuitively truths unknown to the science of his day, and since confirmed by years of experiment. Ray is most successful in dealing with Lear, but in his desire to prove Hamlet mad he rather overstates. Apart from the question of lost moral responsibility, were Hamlet mad, we now

explain otherwise his disregard of Polonius slain and dismissal to death of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. And surely it is not only insane persons who take pleasure in ridiculing those whom they dislike! A scientific writer would naturally stress Shakespeare's power of observation: and we must note his remark that Shakespeare would have opportunities to observe insane persons, since, in his day, madmen, unless raving or idiots, were considered responsible. The whole effect of the work is to promote awe and wonder at Shakespeare's power.

## VI

GULIAN VERPLANCK<sup>1</sup> notices the skill with which Shakespeare has humanized *John*. He has not corrected history or furnished new scenes and characters, but elevated them into a higher region of poetry and feeling, compressing so as to bring out the points on which the tragic interest of the remodelled tragedy should rest. From a fond and wronged mother Constance attains to a majesty of maternal grief equal to the highest Greek conceptions. Her sorrows, the fate of Arthur, the guilt of John, and the retributive justice give unity of interest such as dramatic history could not attain. To stress Arthur's wrongs Shakespeare from the first has impressed his right to the throne on the audience. The contrast and gay relief make the sad tale more deeply true and real. Falconbridge is a tragi-comedy of the higher order, compound of Hotspur and Mercutio. As regards incident and character, the play is least original—but in feeling, poetry, dramatic skill, ethical truth one of the most original.

*Richard II* is a drama of national incident and public characters; its interest is exclusively historical. It lacks Shakespeare's delicate and graceful touches, but is morally rich, and shows men acting in great and stirring scenes. It paints nicely the arts of political popularity and fickleness of popular favour. It shows the crawling abjectness in adversity of him to whom office alone gives dignity. In short, the moral is that human greatness gives little dignity when not used for the beneficent ends for which it was bestowed—and how severe is the just, though late, retribution of shame and woe for its abuse. All this is embodied in real incidents, and characters true to life and to the spirit of the most romantic and picturesque period of European history. It is one of the most perfect historical dramas ever written, yet pale compared with *A. and C.*, or *Henry IV*, which are founded on history, but not restricted to it, which have the gay contrast of comic invention, or flashes of deeper tragic emotion. The interest here is purely historical and political.

*1 Henry IV* is the most popular play in the language, to which most people owe their truest conceptions of England's feudal ages. The main

<sup>1</sup> *The Illustrated Sh.* (New York, Harper & Brothers, 1847).

interest is the Prince's career, and the rebellions and the King's cold policy subserve it. Falstaff is the most original and real of comic creations, and, with all his reality, as much a creature of Shakespeare's fancy as Ariel. Falstaff, Hamlet, Don Quixote are unlike people in actual life, yet so true that we argue about their actions and motives and qualities as of living persons—e.g. Falstaff's courage. Hotspur must have been drawn from personal observation of contemporary minds of his class and order, under the influence of feudal manners, individualized by personal peculiarities, such as 'speaking thick', to aid dramatic illusion. The play is historical in the highest sense, being penetrated with the spirit of the times and the men and scenes it represents. Shakespeare converts the dead, cold record of past occurrences into the very tragi-comedy which they must have exhibited as they arose, and thus reflects 'the very age . . .'. Part II yields in art, but not in genius, being less perfect as an historical tragi-comedy, and nearer to the dramatized chronicle. It differs from the latter by compressing into connected actions events really separated by years. The nobler characters are less chivalric and romantic, the action has less stage interest and effect, the poetry less kindling and exciting fervour. But there are gems; and the graver dialogue is rich in thought and impressive in style. The humour is more rich and copious, if less lively and sparkling: Shallow and Silence are worth volumes of antiquarian research. The revolutions, wars, conspiracies, rebellions, of both parts, are made picturesque and lifelike. There is also wise moral teaching—instability of mortal greatness, emptiness of pomp and power, responsibility of power, ingratitude of the great, fickleness of the masses. Though the cause of the ethical teaching is political, the speculation or admonition is personal. The philosophy is ethical, without the larger views of society as an organized whole, or conflicts of political principles, as in the Roman plays and *Troilus*.

*Henry V* is Shakespeare's only play addressed entirely to national feeling, not to men as men. Chronicle history attains epic elevation. With the choruses which are lyrical in spirit, and the amusing effect of the comic scenes, the drama is perfect of its kind. If faint and dim compared with *Lear* or *Macbeth*, it is so from inferior subject, not execution. The effect seems to have been produced directly and completely, but the texts show that the first play was rewritten. Much poetic splendour was added to the spirited action of the original draft, but the only change of character was the higher and graver moral feeling given to Henry. The play has perfect unity and continuity, without the marked contrasts of style of *R.* and *J.* and some others.

In *1 Henry VI* Shakespeare first raised the dramatized chronicle to the plane of art, giving to represented history the unity of a pervading interest, sentiment, and object—making of characters living human beings—and adding fancy and humour. But his progress was gradual



though rapid—and these plays are superior merely in spirit, vigour, congruity of parts. Henry's gentle lowliness of spirit is brought out with a prominence and beauty far beyond what Shakespeare found in history. According to Lancastrian chronicles, imbecility rather than gentle virtues unfitted him to be king. In the Cardinal's death, York's last scene, and many of Henry's speeches appear a power of the pathetic and terrible, promising *Lear* and *Macbeth*. The plays, for all their defects, have replaced the chronicle for the history of the Wars of the Roses in the public mind. They are inferior to the plays that follow, yet have the congruity of character, mutual enchainment of events, allusions, and opinions which show they were kept in view together in the author's mind as the several parts of one continuous plot, though not constituting a single dramatic whole. In Shakespeare's life they were accepted as his, and the assertion of Malone and later editors that Part I is not his is groundless. We cannot judge whether all his works are authentic by the standard of his most mature art. Like all great artists he used the instruments of his art as he found them, before he remodelled them for grander and more exquisite purposes. Part II scarcely deviates from the old play, but expands and gives effect to the characters, incidents, and sentiments. In Part III larger portions of the older drama are preserved untouched, but there are also both larger omissions and insertions of original matter. Henry's ruminations while watching the battle, Gloucester's soliloquy in Act III, and Margaret's speech before the battle of Tewkesbury breathe the spirit and music of Shakespeare's maturity. They may have been added after the production of *Richard III* to harmonize more clearly with that play the portion of the historical scenes most immediately connected with it. If we compare Greene, Peele, Lodge, Marlowe we find in none of them that consistent biographical delineation carried through a variety of characters which obtains here. The verse is said to be unlike Shakespeare's: which means unlike his perfect later style. His early verse was elaborated and regular, with an artificial melody. His first poetic comedy was an innovation in its verse on the monotonous heroic measure. When *Henry VI* was produced English poetry had produced nothing nearer than this to the nobler verse of Shakespeare's later dramatic dialogue. At present we cannot expect to find the original, condensed, hazardous, thought-burdened cast of language which he afterwards used regularly.

*Richard III* is said to be the most popular play, but in higher attributes of poetic drama cannot compare with the greater tragedies or graver scenes of the best comedies. It has not the profuse intellectual wealth which, in the poet's great works, overflows in every sentence, crowds his dialogue with thought, and evolves suggestions of deepest truth from individual passion, character, incident. There are no delicacies of thought or word, no unexpected images of sweetness or joy, as in even

the darkest parts of *Hamlet* or *Lear*. Except Clarence's dream and the murder of the princes, there are no deeply pathetic or awfully grand or terrible scenes. Its power and elevation consist in the grand, original, and sustained conception of its one principal character, almost sublime in demoniacal heroism, in unflagging energy of heroic guilt. Despite falsehood, fraud, treachery, cruelty we are compelled to admire. Its popularity proves that though faintly marked with other Shakespearian characteristics, it is original, vigorous, fertile, powerful. The style and verse resemble those parts of *Henry VI* denied to be Shakespeare's. The diction shows the transition state between the earlier works and *Henry IV* and the *Merchant*. Clarence's dream and a few other passages show the dawn of the poetic splendour that was to be.

*Henry VIII* was the work of later years, when Shakespeare's genius was inclined to repose alike from the merriment of youthful comedies and stern meditation or wild passion of the tragedies—and rather to portray man in his social and political relations. Unlike the preceding histories England appears in a state of peace—and political fortune fluctuates from other causes than war. The play is grave ethical comedy, as *Richard III* was historical tragedy, and *Henry IV* historical tragi-comedy. *Henry VIII* could not be a hero, neither could he be shown as a hateful tyrant, and so interest centres in the varying yet always purifying effect of misfortune on character—viz. Buckingham, Wolsey, Katharine. Scarcely a play of Shakespeare's contains so many passages, which have become familiar to every reader, as occur in these scenes. The language falls short of that of the great tragedies, but so far resembles it as to prove the play to be of the same or a later period.

*Verona* is a work of early youth, and the next stage of intellectual progress to *Venus*. Yet it promises future power of original humour and vivid delineation of character. Julia and Sylvia foretell Viola, Rosalind, Imogen. Of course, truth of nature and ideal grace are marked with the faint colouring and uncertain drawing of a timid hand. The plot is carefully constructed, and if the denouement is hastened, it is from want of dramatic skill. The characters and incidents are original, and the humorous parts still more original and unfettered by authority. From Gammer Gurton to Launce and Speed is a gigantic stride. The play shows Shakespeare at a most interesting point.

Much of the *Errors* is broad and farcical, yet with unity of purpose and spirit equal to *Macbeth*. Shakespeare used the incidents of Latin comedy as materials of his own invention, as later he used Holinshed. He did it in an unbroken strain of joyous humour, which he could not have maintained through a patchwork renovation of an inferior author's work.

Shakespeare first merely intended to revise the older play of the *Shrew*, but his fancy and invention led him to recast and reconstruct

the whole story. He improved and heightened the humour and interest by filling the stage with gay and rapid action, and further individualizing the characters. The Induction specially bears the impress of his mind. He has rejected some passages of splendid imagery, and substituted others more poetical. Scene ii with Sly resembles the *Merchant*, in the transition stage between his early defective style and its later compressed, thought-burdened character.

*M. Ado* shows direct and personal observation of life, compared with *Verona*, where Valentine and Proteus are gentlemen and lovers painted at second-hand from books. In this play the ease, familiarity, and truth could only have been gained by actual converse with those who have leisure and taste to cultivate the elegances of life and ornamental graces and decorations of mind and manners. In poetic passages, such as the Friar's speech, the versification and imagery are those of the middle period. Shakespeare meant to interest and amuse by exhibiting life and character, and introduced graver incidents only to keep up the interest of the story. His main object is always lively dramatic effect on the stage.

*L. L. L.*, like other early works, has rudiments of characters to which Shakespeare afterwards returned and made more living and individual. Biron has the germs of Benedict and Jaques. The comedy presents a group of brilliant persons as they appear in the artificial conversation and continual effort to surprise or dazzle by wit or eloquence, which was the prevailing taste of the age. A young poet who had grasped the leading idea might achieve this without personal knowledge of aristocratic society. If we glance at the comedies of Congreve, written before he was twenty-five, we see how soon the brilliant effects of mere intellect can be acquired, while works in which the moral nature must co-operate are of slower growth. This play shows Shakespeare's mind passing through the phase of invention and dialogue and artificial brilliancy. The later additions—Rosaline's character of Biron in Act II, her final dialogue with him, and Biron's speeches in Acts I and IV—belong in thought and style to the period of *M. N. D.* or the *Merchant*. The characters of broad humour, as always, are original and inventive; indeed, their reality makes the more courtly and poetic persons more unreal.

The *Merchant* shows mature power and confidence, but has not the overflowing abundance of reflection, sentiment, varied allusion, with which every year was to store the poet's mind. It has freedom and beauty in its unborrowed and unrivalled melody, a plot perfectly constructed by the skilful involution and blending of two stories, a deeply interesting action, variety, spirit, truth, and vivid discrimination of character, copious wit, splendid poetry, and deep and beautiful moral eloquence. Yet it is the least Shakespearian of the greater dramas, as *Lear* and *Macbeth* are the most. Compare Portia's speech on mercy,

and the brief passages in *Lear* urging the duties of sympathy. Impassioned imagery is less combined with ponderous thoughts clothed in burning words—volumes of wisdom less compelled into a brief phrase. It has more the tone of ethical poetry than drama, except Shylock's scenes of fiercer passion. It proves the variety and extent of Shakespeare's genius. It has been called improbable, but a succession of probable events puts an end to the excitement of unexpectedness, and shuts out the interest of hope or fear for the characters. If singular incidents can be made to be believed for the moment the stronger is the interest.

If the *Wives* is later than *Henry IV* the decline of Falstaff does prove that Shakespeare's skill has grown less. But to regard it as an early play subsequently remodelled would be consistent with belief in the progress of Shakespeare's extraordinary intellect, acquiring greater vigour with exercise. It has a prodigal and glorious throng of incident and character, and for variety and broad, unceasing effect it is unrivalled. Each individual stands out in the clearest light, and helps to reflect the sunshine of the author's intellect. Falstaff is only inferior to his former self, and his gullibility makes him amiable.

However admirable and poetic and humorous, *Twelfth-Night* does not fully promise the later works, even those below the highest rank. After the deeper sentiment and sadder philosophy of the great tragedies, Shakespeare could not write anything untouched by the storm-like inspiration which had swept over his mind. The poetry of *Twelfth-Night* is exquisite, but has not the intense idiosyncrasy of thought and expression, the unparalleled fusion of intellectual and passionate, which discriminates *Lear* from the *Merchant*. Shakespeare's highest and most peculiar powers were not yet developed. There is as much humour in the later works as the earlier—as much in Autolycus as Bottom—but after he had acquired the tragic cast of thought festive enjoyment never predominates: the flashes of gay invention illuminate a grave or gloomy background. In this wholly pleasurable play the gay and ludicrous predominate over, yet assimilate with, the higher dramatic poetry; because the passion is not strong emotion, but fancy and sentiment. The delicate fancy and romantic sentiment of the poetic masque are delightfully combined with a crowd of revellers. The latter are exaggerated to produce broadest comic effect, yet saved from buffoons because drawn truly from life. Malvolio was new in his day, and has never since had his fellow or copy, but it is a conception as true as original and droll—as we may see by comparing him with the real Malvolios to be found everywhere. Sir Toby has an odd family likeness to Falstaff; but all alike, grave and gay, laughs and laughed-at, harmonize in one scene and one common purpose. Like *Macbeth* the play seems to have been struck out at a heat, as if plot, characters, dialogue had presented themselves in a group to the mind's eye of the poet before he began to write.

*A.Y.L.* is romantic, philosophical, picturesque, one of Shakespeare's most peculiar and original works, belonging to the period of perfection of his art and taste in his special walk of poetic comedy. At the outset of his career tragedy was fully formed, but comedy was a coarse farce. The foundation of comedy is delineation of character, but Shakespeare was no mere satirist, or painter of humorous absurdities. He entwined and contrasted the whole with refined forms of grace and beauty, and the poetry of fancy, sentiment, and moral meditation. He combined exquisite truth of character, and scenes of wildest drollery, with romantic grace and every form of purely poetic fancy. Of his works of humour only the *Wives* lacked this contrast, and in the revision he added it to the concluding scene. To produce this one mixed impression he selected legendary and romantic subjects rather than contemporary. In his first comedies humour verges on farce, contrasted with the dialogue of artificial, sparkling wit. The beauty of the poetry that relieves these is of the masque, sonnet, or pastoral rather than the drama. *A.Y.L.* belongs to the close and perfection of the peculiarly Shakespearian poetic and romantic comedy. Graver thoughts succeed, but it does not mark the beginning of the change noted by Hallam. The melancholy is of a pleasing kind, untinged by bitter loathing and disgust. It is as original as *M.N.D.* or the *Tempest*, yet human and natural, and with idealized truth. The trappings of society are tastefully thrown off by those who have worn them with ease and grace.

*M.N.D.* is in some ways Shakespeare's most remarkable work, of a class by itself. Were *Lear* and *Othello* lost we should not think less of his genius. Here we see the brilliant lightness of his 'forgetive' fancy in its most sportive and luxuriant vein. Its transitions are as rapid, and the images and scenes it presents to the imagination as unexpected and remote from each other, as in a lyric; while, as in a perfect lyric, its pervading unity of poetic spirit and continued glow of excited thought blends the whole rich and strange variety in one gay and dazzling brilliant effect. In the mock play we see the finer idealities of heroic and playful fancy contrasted with vulgar human nature—the grotesquely ludicrous with the irregularly beautiful. The skilled dramatist embodies the apparently discordant plots and personages in a perfectly connected and harmonious whole.

*M. for M.* is near the beginning of that part of Shakespeare's life (1602-9) in which were produced *Othello* with its bitter passion, the additions to *Hamlet* with their melancholy wisdom, *Timon* with its indignant and hearty scorn, and *Lear* with dark pictures of unmixed guilt and terrible prophet-like denunciations. There must have been a personal cause for the change. His creations are coloured by the varying moods that predominated during the changes of life. The succession of gay and bright poetic comedies proves that few men could

have enjoyed life more, or relished more intensely the beautiful or pleasurable, or revelled more in the ludicrous and fantastical. Contrast *M. for M.* with the *Merchant*, where the same topics are often treated. Some deep wound of the affections—some repeated evidence of man's ingratitude—may have brought home to Shakespeare the living sense of the world's worthlessness, and opened to his sight the mysterious evil of his own nature. In his later works we find enjoyment and serenity, but never again personal abandonment to the beauty or humour of the scene—as when he mixed in the plot against the bachelor liberty of Benedict, or enjoyed the frolics in Eastcheap as much as Falstaff or the Prince. If the comic scenes in *M. for M.* please it is because they faithfully picture life. Both these and the loftier scenes portray too faithfully the degrading and hardening influence of licentious passion. The mood is contemptuous, sad, indignant, by turns, but never playful or imaginative. Light and amusing characters are branded with contempt from the degradation of licentious habits. The same passion, less gross but more guilty, overthrows high reputation, talent, wisdom. Contrast the intellectual and amiable Claudio, who would purchase wearied and most loathed worldly life at any cost of shame and sin, with drunken Barnardine reckless of past, present, or future. The distinction between higher and lower characters is that conscience is dead in the latter, but appears in all its terrors to Angelo, Claudio, Isabella. There is little formal morality, but the secret workings of guilt and fear are laid open rapidly and suddenly, like unuttered, half-formed thoughts. With severe unity of purpose and impressive power Shakespeare enforces revolting and humbling truths. The dark picture of moral degradation, guilt, remorse is not relieved, as elsewhere in Shakespeare, by descriptive beauty, or fancy, or tenderness. Only Isabella's severely beautiful character and fervid eloquence provide a contrast. The theme, though disagreeable, produces the kind of pain which excites such intellectual interest as all true and gloomy pictures of life excite. Shakespeare breathes through a repulsive subject the strong emotion of his own soul: like Dante, or Byron, at his best. The language and rhythm are peculiarly hold and austere, and differ markedly from the author's preceding works: the diction is abrupt, condensed, elliptical, often obscure from crowding figurative allusions. It is the extreme of his compressed and suggestive style, and he never carried it further. After *Lear* it was softened and subdued, but in this play, struggling with fullness of thought, he seems striving to pour forth his emotions in a language just acquired and not yet familiar. He carries to excess the experiment of boldly and carelessly deviating from regular rhythm; and this reflects his austerity of thought which was at war with artificial sweetness. When the dark season was over he delighted most in grave and majestic harmony.

Shakespeare's mind cannot be gauged by selected plays; nothing

could have prepared his readers for the *Tempest*, with its solemn grandeur, unrivalled harmony and grace, bold originality, grave beauty. In contrast with the joyous temper of *M.N.D.* its poetry is pervaded by a contemplative philosophy, of the kind that harmonizes and mellows down the richest fancies and boldest inventions into one grave and even severe tone of colour. It is the most original play, and the most perfect as a work of art, in unbroken unity of effect and sustained majesty of intellect. Miranda excels his former portraits of women, uniting truth of nature and exquisitely refined poetic fancy, and is only paralleled by Milton's Eve. The sailors as buffoons serve to contrast the grossness and lowness of civilized vice with the nobler forms of savage depravity. In the solemn thought, calm dignity, and moral wisdom of the dramatic dialogue in its most majestic form, passing now into lyrical, now into didactic or ethical, the play resembles the Greek; and a like bold and free invention and combination of poetic diction makes the English language as flexible as the Greek to every shade of thought.

Much of the graver dialogue of the first two acts of *All's Well* is like *Verona*, and the whole comic part might have been the work of a boyish artist. Yet there breaks forth everywhere the grave moral thoughtfulness of the tragic period, and there lacks the gay and fanciful imagery of the previous comedies. In the subject itself we see no reason why Helena's passion should not have been made as poetical as Imogen's or Juliet's. The answer is that he was not in the mood, that he rewrote the play when his moral and reflective faculty predominated. There is the contrast of two different moods of thought and manners of expression. A few passages of exceeding beauty prove that, as with all writers, former mental habits were apt to revive. The writer's purely dramatic power to identify his own feelings with those of his characters has yielded to moralizing thoughtfulness. He himself expounds and comments on the truths in the fable, rather than let the reader extract them from the representation. The great truth impressed is that only moral and intellectual worth distinguishes man from man. He has been called an aristocrat, but here he even sacrifices dramatic interest by making Bertram inferior to Helena in every honourable quality.

The jealousy of the *W. Tale* is less powerfully shown than Othello's, but results from deeper knowledge of the human heart, being that of a self-tormentor. In the involved and broken style, which is admirably adapted to it, we see the peculiar cast of language of *Lear* and *Macbeth* applied to a new purpose. The pastoral beauty of the second part is an exquisite contrast. The play is not among the greatest, because it is not unified by the sustained intensity of purpose and feeling, which should also communicate to the reader a glow of excitement and interest corresponding with what the author felt. It reads as if Shakespeare had not previously filled his mind and then poured it out, but sat down

with the book before him, to follow it as it led his thoughts or suggested new ones.

In *R. and J.* Shakespeare does not anticipate the sad and bitter end, but luxuriates in the short-lived happiness. He must have written it when he had just attained full possession of his strength, while still immature in knowledge. It belongs to his transition time from poetic to dramatic—from external nature, ingenious fancy, active thought to the deeper philosophy of the heart. The first edition (1597) contains all the plot, incidents, characters of the play, as at present, with its sweetness and beauty of imagery and luxury of language, and nearly all its gaiety and wit. The defects of taste are more conspicuous because contained within a smaller compass, viz. rhyming couplets, conceits, over-fanciful metaphors. In the second edition (1599) are added Juliet's soliloquies with their solemn melody of rhythm. Also the passion grows more direct and intense and less imaginative, and the language more condensed and suggestive. The first edition contains some of the usual blemishes of the poetry and eloquence of the age; in the second the contrast is so great that the change cannot have taken place in two years, and the first version must belong to Shakespeare's twenty-seventh or twenty-eighth year. Except Mercutio, he got all his characters from Brooke's poem, and much of the plot; but he used what was best and improved it.

*Othello*, among Shakespeare's later works, has fewer deep ethical reflections suggested by experience and generalized by the intellect, but more evident results of accurate personal observation of human nature and intimate acquaintance with man's inmost being. It paints emotions and passions that no young poet could reason out from his own mind or depict by his inexperienced imagination. It required actual experience or else observation of bitter passions.

*Macbeth* was no doubt completely meditated before any part was written, so that it was presented to Shakespeare's mind as a single conception. Its rapidity and intensity all bear to one end, and also its compressed and suggestive diction.

*Lear* is the most Shakespearian play, and most remarkable for the boldest use of language. The crowd of images and weight of thought oppress even Shakespeare's mastery of language, till his expressions become hurried and imperfect. It eclipses all for magnificent originality of rhythm, unshackled by stricter rules of metrical regularity, and flexible to the expression of every varying emotion or gust of passion, yet delighting most in a grave solemn harmony, unknown to the more artificial metre of his predecessors, and even to his own earlier poetry. Above all, the emotions of the individual or incidents of the scene are constantly expanded into wide ethical reflections.

*Cymbeline* is a work of Shakespeare's maturer mind and fullness of power, as we see from the cast of solemn and philosophical thought,



the compressed and elliptical diction, and the bold and free use of words and phrases in new or unusual applications. It probably belongs to the period between the enlarged *R. and J.* and *Othello*. Note the romantic plot, the luxury of the description of Imogen and her chamber, the mountain scenes depicted with excited interest and youthful spirit, and the forest occupations of Belarius and his boys. Yet it may have been written in the genial hours of Shakespeare's declining age, when the gloom had passed away, and early recollections were thronging back. The vision of Leonatus has been called an interpolation, but it is interwoven with the plot. It is the one blemish, because Jupiter and the machinery of classical mythology, unlike fairies and magicians, cannot be made even poetically probable. Perhaps *Cymbeline* was an early melodrama rewritten in last years. Imogen is Desdemona transplanted to the dim regions of old romance. Besides the same deep, pure, and devoted love, singleness of heart, and resolve of purpose she has a high imaginative grace. Posthumus is a less terrible Othello, Cloten another Roderigo. The poet's milder mood softens Iachimo's revenge into a more pardonable selfish vanity, unlike Iago's. If the play is inferior to the great tragedies, it is from less lofty object and design, not feebler power. It has the interest of romantic narrative, decorative grace, and liberal and practical philosophy.

*Timon* shows that the variety and fertility of Shakespeare's genius has no limit. The sad morality of *Hamlet* is more in sorrow than anger, that of *Timon* is fierce, angry, caustic, and vindictive. It is rather a solemn prelude or lingering echo to the wild passion of *Lear*. The plot turns on one incident, and is merely a vehicle for the author's satire. It is far below the great plays, yet proves Shakespeare as terrible a satirist as those whose fame rests on that alone. The difference is strongly marked between the Shakespearian rhythm and diction and imagery of the principal scenes and soliloquies, and the tamer, uncharacteristic style of much of the story and dialogue and accessories of the main interest. It is like the contrast between the first drafts of some of the later plays and the later additions. Yet the thought is entirely one, as if proceeding from a single mind: much more than in the *Shrew*. Probably the play is the unfinished work of a great master completed by another hand. Discrepancy of taste, style, power of execution are combined with unity of plot, purpose, and intent.

The Roman plays belong to a later era. They have the general style and spirit of *Othello* and *Macbeth*, yet softened and sobered. The style is less compressed and allusive, the tone less excited. The whirlwind of passion has passed and left a solemn calm. The same surpassing power exists, but is not equally put forth, and yields to an artist—like calmness and personal self-possession. Something may be due to the subject, but also to a less readily kindling sympathy in the poet. He less identifies his own feelings with his personages than reflects from the calm sur-

face of his mind the true and living portraiture of their characters, emotions, and lofty bearing. Especially is this so with *Coriolanus*, where he regards man entirely in his general, social, and political relations.

*J.C.* has the maturity of advancing age, and therefore reflective intellect predominates. It was written in the early years of James I, when popular rights were conflicting with the divine regal power and prerogative. Shakespeare's point of view is that of artist and philosopher, but not partisan. In *Coriolanus* he embodied a brilliant and noble aristocracy. He represents the Roman people as injured and insulted, yet grateful for public services. The hero is gigantic both for good and evil, and he suffers strict poetic justice, owing his exile, sorrow, and death to his unfeeling arrogance. If the central figure absorbs the interest the fault is in human nature itself, which bows down before courage, mind, and energy, and neglects the ignorant many. If this means that Shakespeare approved arbitrariness, what shall we infer from *J.C.*? At a time when despotic rights of the crown were debated, he let Brutus speculate before a popular audience on Caesar's probable abuse of power when crowned! The advocates of kingly power would call Brutus an assassin, yet Shakespeare represented him as the perfect model of the mild, contemplative, philosophical, yet heroic republican. Also he made him the centre of interest, and threw Caesar into the shade; though Caesar was one of those characters uniting the scholar, gentleman, and man of action which Shakespeare loved to describe. Nothing must detract from the interest of the highest and purest republican virtue, great alike in its domestic loveliness, the moderation of its triumph, and the dignity of its fall. Shakespeare was not expounding a doctrine, but painting human nature as it appears.

*A. and C.* is often like a sequel to *J.C.*: as in the two parts of *Henry IV*, some previous knowledge of characters and story is assumed. It probably belongs to the period of the *Tempest*, which it resembles in metrical freedom, cast of language, and thought. The parallels and differences are too strong to be accidental: viz. the likeness of Antony's farewell to his falling fortunes, and Prospero's farewell—and the contrast of Cleopatra and Miranda, of luxurious and vicious refinement and perfect natural loveliness and goodness. Juliet, Ophelia, Desdemona, Viola, Portia might have been represented by a young man; but Cleopatra could only have sprung from actual observation or the reflected knowledge supplied by history. Plutarch gave the outline, and Shakespeare finished the character minutely, drawing the fragments from various quarters, perhaps very humble ones, and blending them into a brilliant impersonation of individual truth. Antony shows the weakness of a great mind, of a hero past the middle stage of life. Other poets, such as Dryden, fearful of ridicule, avoided alluding to Antony's age. Shakespeare brings it into bold relief, and luxuriates in

the irregular greatness of his hero. He keeps close to historic truth, and makes his scenes of passionate frailty individual and original by his knowledge of, and sympathy with, human infirmity. A copious and varied magnificence pervades the play, as from a mind stored with treasures acquired in its past intellectual efforts, as well as with knowledge of life and books. The poetry has the autumnal richness that follows truly the vernal luxuriance of genius or its fiercer mid-summer glow.

*T. and C.* is a very singular production, and has beauties of the highest order. There are passages of the highest moral truth and political wisdom that remind us of Hooker or Jeremy Taylor. The speech of Ulysses on law and order is in the spirit of Burke. Also we get passages of profound and persuasive practical ethics, and grave advice for the government of life. With these are scenes of youthful passion, beautiful imagery, and poetic fancy. Nor is any drama richer in variety and truth of character. But there is a large alloy of inferior matter, and the whole effect is unsatisfactory, from want of unity and interest at the purposeless succession of incident and dialogue. Shakespeare had never before failed to harmonize the parts of a play in one central interest. Another incongruity is that the main story is founded on the legendary, medieval history of Troy, but the chief characters are most substantial and lifelike. The philosophy and ethics also contradict anything mock-heroic. Probably the plot of the original youthful play was from Chaucer, but after 1596, when Chapman's *Homer* was published, Shakespeare added the intellectual portions and nicer touches of character. They are as much like afterthoughts inserted in a different groundwork as the passages of thoughtful philosophy added to *Hamlet*.

The external evidence that Shakespeare wrote *Titus* is strong, and with all its faults it suited the taste of the times. It is not entirely remote from his after-excellence, and it is at least equal to his models for the tragedy of coarse horror—Peele and Kyd. The verse is nearer to his early comedies than the latter to the solemn harmony of Prospero's majestic morality: he had to acquire his grand organ-swell by trial and practice.

*Pericles* is the type of the old legendary drama, awkwardly constructed, and rambling through two generations. It does not create illusion, and the characters—most rare in Shakespeare—are vague and meagre and lack the portrait-like individuality which gives reality to his humblest personages. Parts may be excellent, but the whole has a feeble effect, and the verse is halting and uncouth. Yet there is much to please and surprise—such as old Gower who links the broken action. Even the first scenes have some grand passages, and the later acts are impressed by Shakespeare's mind—the Shakespeare of *Lear*, especially the recognition scene. The style has his emphatic mode of using

plainest, homeliest words in the highest, most poetic sense. Also he states general truths not didactically, but because they grow out of the incidents or emotions of the scene. It was probably an early work corrected later. Shakespeare's genius did not burst forth at once in full splendour. Here the legendary and inartificial structure of the main story and the feeble characters could be least improved, unless the play were recast. The additions and improvements, therefore, stand out boldly from the framework. . . .

Verplanck excels as a systematic critic of Shakespeare; he examines every play and endeavours to disengage Shakespeare's part in it—the extent to which his genius improved upon his sources—and the relation of that improvement to the stage which his genius had reached. He follows Hallam in assigning a personal cause for Shakespeare's change from comedy to tragedy, and we could wish him less positive—but such was the criticism of the time. However, his argument that the gay and bright comedies show that few men can have enjoyed life more is among the surest of those who see Shakespeare's life in his works. Equally characteristic of the time is the attention to moral matters, and here Verplanck is at his best. His remark on *L. L. L.*—the part played by the intellect without the moral nature—is fairly obvious, yet helps us to realize the condition of mind which produced the play, and therefore its unity. He does well to point out the degrading effect of licentious habits in *M. for M.*, and the distinction between the conscienceless and conscience-stricken characters. The result is to make us grasp the unity of the play, which he fails to do with many of his other critiques. This is best illustrated by the *W. Tale* where we see him facing both ways. He makes the statement that Leontes' jealousy springs from a deeper knowledge of the human heart than Othello's, which we cannot accept—but then he explains admirably why the romance falls short of the tragedy. But often, though he praises Shakespeare's verse and characters and dramatic power rightly in the abstract, he fails to find true instances. He tells us that the Cardinal's death scene (*Henry VI*) shows a power of the pathetic and terrible that promises *Lear* and *Macbeth*; that the language of *Henry VIII* falls short of the great tragedies, but resembles it enough to prove the play to be of the same or a later period; that the unity of purpose of the *Errors* equals that of *Macbeth*; that Falstaff's gullibility in the *Wives* makes him amiable; that *Twelfth-Night* does not fully promise the later works; that *Cymbeline* is inferior to the great tragedies, from his lofty object and design, not feebler power. These are falsely compared or falsely blamed or praised because the critic has not unified his single impressions with his general knowledge of Shakespeare. We excepted *L. L. L.* and *M. for M.*, where the moral touch predominated, and we would also except *Coriolanus*. He explains plausibly why the latter play does not stimulate to the full.

He argues throughout that Shakespeare's genius did not burst forth at once in full splendour, but he learnt his business gradually by following the models of his day. Perhaps his theories about *T. and C.* and *Pericles* are speculative, but there is no doubt in the instances of *L. L. L.*, *R. and J.*, *All's Well*, *Hamlet*. The same applies to Shakespeare's verse which, in its beginning, resembled the monotonous heroic measure of Peele and Kyd, and only gradually became flexible to every mood of fancy, sentiment, and passion. He says that in characters of broad humour he was always original and inventive, even in his earliest works; and that although he found tragedy to a certain extent ready-made, he invented poetic comedy, converting it from coarse farce to a refined thing of grace and beauty, with the poetry of fancy, of sentiment, and of moral meditation. As already noted, he assigns a personal reason for Shakespeare's tragic period, and the romances reflect for him a kind of moral recovery. His best single remark is on *John*: that the King is one to whom office alone gives dignity. Otherwise he is not an intense critic; we do not feel that he has experienced the high things of which he writes. He treats of moods and passions like coins with a certain face value commonly recognized by all sorts and conditions of men.

## VII

ACCORDING to George Fletcher,<sup>1</sup> the highest artistic view of Shakespeare's dramas is to realize, in the whole performance, and in all its details, the true and original idea conceived of the work by its creator. A central idea informs each one of his greater dramas, and moulds every one of its features in harmony with the peculiar inspiring soul. Criticism should trace the vital ramification through all the details of character, incident, and dialogue. The real subject of *John* is the triumph of right, justice, feeling, beauty, and poetry, for all time, over the meanness, selfishness, and crime which crush them for the hour. Shakespeare does not represent Constance and Arthur as ambitious; she does not court power for its own sake; but ambition is subordinate to love. When he is captured she only thinks of him as her child. Feeling, not pride, is the mainspring of her character; hence the contrast of Elinor and John. The bond between the latter is common interest; indeed, John only loves people as far as he can use them. In *Cymbeline* Shakespeare shows the trial of heroic affection in the bosom of a wife, and its triumph not only over circumstances, but over disbelief in all conjugal virtue professed by a voluptuary. The bedchamber scene is one of his most exquisite conceptions: involuntary homage of a sacrilegious villain to the purity he is plotting to destroy. The ruminations of the suffering husband serve to cast the loveliest tints of all over Imogen's purity. After his first experience of Imogen, Iachimo becomes a con-

<sup>1</sup> *Studies of Sh.*, 1847.

vert in theory, is forced to cunning slander, in which he succeeds, and is then oppressed by guilt. Her manner of enduring her page's disguise proves that she has a strong and subtle intellect. To an exquisitely feminine nature, which makes the masculine character hard to assume, she adds a constant self-possession, so that she never forgets the part she is playing, and her sex is unsuspected.

*Macbeth* shows the gathering, discharge, and dispelling of a domestic and political storm which takes its peculiar hue from the hero's individual character: his selfishness joined to an irritable fancy. The inevitable result is excess of morbid apprehensiveness, not inconsistent with the greatest physical courage, but productive of entire moral cowardice. The Witches only aid so far as the inherent evil of his nature and purpose predispose him to take their equivocal suggestions in the most mischievous sense. A sort of respectful sympathy has been got up for Macbeth, which Shakespeare never intended to awaken. Neither with the Witches nor Lady Macbeth does the scheme to murder Duncan originate. Prophecy should have inclined a man, not already guiltily ambitious, to wait quietly the course of events. He is bad in himself, intensely selfish, with no sympathy, and therefore no remorse. He shrinks from public odium and retribution in this life. There is no evidence of moral repugnance or religious scruple. His nervous irritability and active intellect produce his highly poetical rumination. In contriving Banquo's murder he is sure of himself, and does not tell his wife. She is disturbed by remorse for the past, he by fear of the future. No thought of his own perfidy prevents him from blaming the Weird Sisters for falsehood. When his wife dies he just regrets her as one who has been useful to him. Shakespeare has earned the world's gratitude in depicting villains—such as the poetically whining Macbeth, and the blunt, honest-looking Iago—who can never know remorse because they are incapable of sympathy.

In *A.Y.L.* the sympathetic part of love predominates over the selfish—affection over passion. Genial sympathies and social relations triumph over individual selfishness and misanthropy. Beauty of soul rather than of person attracts every heart. Instant sympathy of soul thrills Rosalind when she first meets Orlando. Her mind is anxiously active; she does not talk merely for talking's sake, but strong feeling or earnest purpose dictate her every syllable. She is not lovesick and languishing, but love-inspired to active benevolence and happy invention. The development of Benedict and Beatrice in *M. Ado* is closely intertwined: this is the main subject. Each is the other's counterpart; their underlying seriousness is made to appear with great art. She attacks him to defend her sex; and because he really prefers her he is extravagantly mortified. Their friends would not have tried to make them marry in mere levity. The venerable Leonato would not have been so devoid of serious care for his niece's welfare as to carry on a

plot for idle or mischievous diversion. The first grand appeal is made to the affections, the second to generosity. Each first wishes to assure the other that love is required; neither seeks to enjoy the triumph or thinks of the jests of friends. The climax of earnest purpose, generous feeling, and seriousness is where she persuades him to challenge Claudio, and he delivers the challenge.

Shakespeare's object in *R. and J.* was not to show that the misfortunes of the lovers were self-caused; neither did he read youth a lesson. He idealizes the power and triumph of love in its largest and noblest sense, and he proves that sympathetic love is the most rapid and powerful agent in drawing forth the individual's energies, and that such union of hearts, when once perfected, has a force beyond all other to resist the assaults of fate. Their worldly happiness is shattered not by defect of character, but by overruling adverse destiny. The contrast is the vulgar discord of the families. As external pressure grows Juliet acquires new strength. Her father had treated her like an article of property, a plaything; another contrast to the unison of her character with Romeo's. She develops a clear and bright apprehension, a cool and concentrated resolve. Alone in her chamber her powers of imagination, judgement, and will appear, each operating with the utmost vigour, and all in perfect harmony. The horrors she foresees are not fanciful, but inevitable if she wakes too soon. When her family bewail her seeming death each grieves for the calamity which has befallen self. Love triumphs over Fortune and Death, and finally over the Hate which has been its deadliest foe. . . .

The criticism that each of Shakespeare's plays is informed by a leading idea, though often met with, is on the whole unsatisfactory, since it implies that the philosopher preceded the poet. Yet there are times when by means of it the critic indirectly throws light on a character—as he does here with Constance, Orlando and Rosalind, and Leonato. Of *Cymbeline* and *R. and J.* we do not learn much from him; and surely no one will be satisfied by his estimate of Macbeth. In justice it must also be said that this style of criticism sometimes helps us to realize the true unity of a play—as it most does here with *A.T.L.*

## VIII

THOMAS CAMPBELL,<sup>1</sup> writing of the Sonnets, finds some but not all worthy of Shakespeare. They exhibit the age stamping its character on him rather than the converse. *Titus* has some merit, but is too revolting to be his work. Apart from horrors its poetry and versification is un-Shakespearian. *Verona* is immature, but shows him in bounding high spirits. It was unpardonable of Julia to forgive her truant lover. To add the second pair of twins in the *Errors* is to over-

<sup>1</sup> *Remarks on Life and Writings of Sh.*, 1848 (prefixed to Moxon's edition).

step the limits. The characters of *L.L.L.* are playfully sketched rather than strongly delineated; but the whole play is a riot of wit.

*Richard II* has skilful delineation of character, but plays on words—Shakespeare's besetting sin. Our sympathy is early transferred from Richard to Bolingbroke. Shakespeare had Lancastrian prejudices, but he shows us that Henry IV did not inherit his father's virtues. *Richard III* shows power of terrific delineation, and is an epoch with Shakespeare and the drama, replacing suppleness with knotted strength. It recalls the saying that Michael Angelo could stamp sublimity on the hump of a dwarf.

Shylock has not Richard III's tragic grandeur, but similar force of mind and subtlety of intellect, though less selfish. He has more courage, for he is an ill-used man, and he is not a hypocrite like Richard. Shakespeare draws a philosophical picture of the energetic Jewish character, and traces the blame of its faults to the iniquity of the Christian world. Of all his works *M.N.D.* most convinces that this miserable world once contained a happy man. The play is purely delicious, little intermixed with the painful passions from which poetry distils her sterner sweets. The happiness of Theseus and Hippolyta is seemingly secure, and throws a tranquil assurance that all will end well.

2 *Henry IV* is the most original piece in the world, and the richest in characters. Antiquity has nothing like Falstaff, and the world will never look upon his like again. *John* is rather the execution of a criminal than an interesting tragedy. To Shakespeare alone is due the pathos of Arthur's conference with Hubert, the whole part of Constance, and the appallingly interesting dialogue between John and Hubert. Constance becomes the most interesting character in nature—a doting and bereaved mother.

The characters of *All's Well* are not deeply marked, but Helena and the Countess interest. The Countess redeems nobility by reverting to nature. Only supreme poetry can take captive our imaginations for a woman who has survived her youth and beauty. *A.T.L.* is an instance of genius transmuting a prolix and pedantic prose narrative into magical poetry. The improbability is that Rosalind and Celia should go to the forest to seek father and uncle yet take no trouble to find them; but the truth is that if you delight us in fiction you may make our sense of probability slumber as deeply as you please. The truth of nature must be observed in the main, and Shakespeare will make us forget what is eccentric from nature in a limited view by showing it more beautifully probable in a larger contemplation. The fool and philosopher might have hated each other at court, but like each other in the forest. The courtiers seem as much naturalized to the forest as its natives, and the general truth of nature is equally preserved. The church scene of *M. Ado* is deeply touching, and Beatrice's behaviour then almost reconciles us to her otherwise disagreeable character. Its



improbability excludes it from being one of the most enchanting plays. Would Don John who did not love Hero take so much trouble to spite Claudio? A good heart that shows itself only on extraordinary occasions—like that of Beatrice—does not compensate for her undoubted bad temper. The Falstaff of the *Wives* could not be in love with any one but himself. The comic and grave and tender were never more finely amalgamated than in *Twelfth-Night*. The characters are in collusion to aid each other, though seemingly hostile. Viola is sweetly peculiar.

*M. for M.* makes us ask what would become of the human race if the pride of woman in her purity were capable of compromise? It would mean adieu to all domestic affections. The improbability is that the Duke should appoint Angelo when he knew that he had treated Mariana basely. Othello's half-natural habits of barbarism break out under jealousy, and although this was so probably managed as to seem unavoidable, it prevents neither our pity nor terror. One symptom of anger from Desdemona would have endangered our sympathy. No drama in the world has more wonderfully amalgamated the natural and supernatural than *Macbeth*, or made the substances of truth more awful by their superstitious shadows. Shakespeare gives at once the awful appearance of preternatural impulse on Macbeth's mind, and yet leaves him a free agent and voluntary sinner.

Shakespeare irradiated the truth of Roman history without encroaching on its solid shapes with the hues of fancy. Brutus (*J.C.*) is strictly historical—though by poetry new-hallowed to the imagination. The philosophy of the classical and later plays was more matured, and their insight into human nature deep and clear. The philosophy of *Hamlet* was vague, perhaps because the hero was neither entirely in his perfect mind nor entirely out of it. The lines spoken by Marullus are among the most magnificent in English.

Is *Timon* a tragedy since it leaves us more affected by its comic dialogue than its tragic conclusion? It is the production of Shakespeare's spleen more than his heart. *Cymbeline* is the fittest play to prove that great dramatic genius can risk bold improbabilities. We forget the wager because of the charming incidents that result. Imogen hallows to the imagination all she loves or is loved by, so we forgive Posthumus because she does. *A. and C.* is as literally faithful to history as it is to the truth of nature. Shakespeare paints Cleopatra as if under her spell, yet keeps us far from a vicious sympathy. A glance at Octavia recalls our homage to virtue. . . .

Campbell makes no great discoveries, but his criticism has a certain freshness. He records his experience of Shakespeare truly, uninfluenced by the immense amount of commentary which has preceded him. Often it is little more than a mere statement of personal preferences—e.g. his words on Julia and Beatrice and on *Timon*. And he can

condone the improbabilities of *Cymbeline* because the story pleased him, but not those of *M. for M.* But on the whole he is saved from serious lapses by his genuine poetic feeling. He is a poet, though a small one, and as such he can touch the hem of Shakespeare's garment—though no more. His most successful remarks are on *All's Well*, *A.Y.L.*, and *Twelfth-Night*. His nearest fellow-critic is the German Heine.

## IX

CARLYLE calls Shakespeare the greatest intellect that has left literary record; Emerson says that his was the best head of the universe, and all literature is now Shakespearianized; Dawson, that we had best assume he is always right, and he has never yet been left behind—and also that he was the healthiest and best-balanced man that ever lived; Fletcher, that he is unrivalled and alone in his human omniscience and dramatic omnipotence.

On his characters we get the following judgements: Emerson's, that he clothed them with form and sentiments as if they were people who had lived under his roof; Ray's, that they were real mortal men; Verplanck's, that he was not concerned with opinions, but painted human nature as it appears; Fletcher's, that his characters were as individual as actual and living persons.

Carlyle has an incomparable remark on his humour: that he had known deep sorrows, but exaggerated only in laughter; Hunter speaks of his humane and kindly spirit; Verplanck affirms that in characters of broad humour he was always original and inventive, even in earliest works; and Campbell writes of Launce and the dog that these comic geniuses assume an unconscionable empire over our fanciful faith.

Tributes to his philosophy are Ray's, that he had the power to deduce general principles from the narrowest range of observation, and his power of philosophical discrimination showed the highest order of genius; Dawson's, that he gave the laws of the world, not poetic justice, and never falls into the true immorality of painting life as it is not; and Fletcher's, that he had the truest and most pervading insight into every condition of the human mind and heart.

Of Shakespeare as an artist, the three following opinions may be compared: Emerson's, that his omnipresent humanity co-ordinates all his faculties; Verplanck's, that he had the power to comprise varied details in one view, preserving individuality and truth of parts, and blending them in one effect, one central and pervading interest; Fletcher's, that a true and original idea informed the whole and the parts of each play.

Only Verplanck writes of his verse—that by degrees he perfected an unrivalled vehicle of dramatic poetry, flexible to every mood of fancy, sentiment, passion, unequalled for its purposes in the literature of any age or nation. Only Fletcher maintains that women are the

crowning charm of his work. Also he describes *Macbeth* as the greatest tragedy of the world's greatest dramatist; while Campbell says that most wonderfully in the world's dramas it amalgamates the natural and supernatural. The latter can only see in *Timon* the production of Shakespeare's spleen; to Verplanck it shows the limitless variety of his genius—a power of satire as great as those whose fame rests on that alone. Shakespeare's mind, he says, is not to be gauged by selected plays; and this accords with the statement of Emerson, that his infinite invention is the concealed magnet of his attraction for us. . . .

From the above we gather that Shakespeare is considered unique among poets, philosophers, and men. A moral strand mingles with the critical: had he been less good a man he would not have been so great a poet and philosopher. Despite our former remarks on Verplanck, we note an increase of definiteness in measuring his range of thought and faculty for verse. The union of realism and romanticism from which sprang his characters is fully recognized; also that true 'unity of interest' which forms the core of his plays and ensures his supremacy as an artist. Such was the opinion of the mid-nineteenth century.

It is to be noted that the American Verplanck keeps closest to earth. His method is directly opposed to the abstract German method.

## Chapter XIII

ENGLAND 1848-1859

- I. HUDSON. II. BIRCH. III. HALPIN. IV. JOHN WILSON (Christopher North). V. KNIGHT. VI. MACNIGHT. VII. GRINFIELD. VIII. BAGEHOT. IX. GRANT WHITE. X. WATKISS LLOYD. XI. REED. XII. BUCKNILL. XIII. CONCLUSION.

### I

**H**. N. HUDSON<sup>1</sup> looks upon Shakespeare as the greatest, wisest, sweetest of men who overcame the difficulties of the drama, which is the greatest thing a human being has done in art. The English or Gothic drama was a native product of the soil; it disregarded minor unities and mingled comic and tragic. The old plays were like a fourth estate of the realm, and combined religion, mirth, instruction, and sport: into this dead, shapeless body Shakespeare put a soul. All art that does not spring from religion is simply imitation, and its beauty enervates instead of touching with awe. The beauty of Christianity aims to chasten and subdue, and therefore only the noblest men can achieve the noblest works. It was a hard task to unify the complex Gothic drama, but Shakespeare's imagination supplied each characteristic play with a governing thought or organic idea, a silent unwritten law, yet felt and observed, like the constitution of a State, perhaps a social power rather than a law. Religious culture shaped the drama, and that of England was far from Greece, because Christianity is historical and idealizes from fact. The classic drama is light, graceful, and expressive; the Gothic profound, solemn, majestic, and suggestive. The Shakespearian drama is complex, like a Gothic cathedral, and lifts men's thoughts to something greater. The more diversified, the greater faculty is needed to unite all in art, and the grander is the impression.

Shakespeare's characters are as real as one's friends; they may resemble each other, but no two are alike. The ideal and real are perfectly interfused, and the idealizing of art is a concentration of truth, whereas literal truth is essential untruth. He puts his own intellectuality into them, and thereby makes them more themselves instead of displacing their individuality. His humour is such that even his dunces move us through our sympathetic emotions. Tragedy and comedy are made up of the same elements differently related. The great and little, the sublime and droll, coexist under a mysterious law of interdependence. Our life is great because little, and the reverse. No one part of us moves perfectly unless the other parts move with it; e.g. the grave-digger scene in *Hamlet* heightens the tragic effect; and Hamlet's humour makes deep and mellow his impassioned thought.

<sup>1</sup> *Sh. his Life, Art, and Characters*, N.Y., 1848; Boston, 1875.

Shakespeare's early style was imitative and rhetorical, but in time his word took on forms as various as the actions of his persons. The lingual form seems to bud and sprout at the moving of the inner mental life; and the two correspond as if the language caught the grain and texture of the character's minds. The aesthetic conscience is the most impartial and inexorable of human powers. It is free from self-interest of fear of consequences, and the poet's conscience of virtue is best kept to himself. The moral sensibilities are the most delicate part of our constitution, and should be touched with the utmost care and without set instruction, but virtue should rather be passionate and impulsive. Shakespeare is as worthy a moral as artistic guide; as we see from his women, he has a moral element of the beautiful. Yet virtue is a discipline with his characters as well as a joy; a strong upright will is the backbone, and conscience the keeper. If he does not distribute good and evil justly neither does Providence. But he has faith in the future, and does not look upon suffering and death here as the worst things. To him the inward conscience of truth and right is the Paradise of a good man's soul.

Lawlessness is the law and central dream-idea of *M.N.D.* Sensuous beauty is the fairies' religion, and they rightly command sensuous and superficial love where is no reason and conscience. The distresses and unrequited love touch our sympathies but not our moral sense. The characters do not act from motive and principle, but capricious impulse and fancy, which fairy powers can influence. Only a dream could have married such contrary things. In the *Merchant* Antonio's treatment of Shylock seems rather a wrong done to himself. Impartiality is the law of art, and therefore a work of art is moral. Portia talks like a poet and philosopher, but just like a woman; in her character are reproduced the splendour of Italian skies and scenery and art. Shylock among his enemies can have no life but money, no hold but interest. He is not more a Jew than he is Shylock; his traits are fused beyond distinction, and his avarice smacks of patriotism. Falstaff of the *Wives* refuses to see what is right, and loses power to see the prudent and safe, and becomes childishly gullible. The characters of *M. Ado* act so because they are so. Claudio is a man beneath all his faults; and Don John slightly foreshadows Iago. In *A.Y.L.* the goodness of the characters is due not only to nature, but to the goodness from habits generated under Gospel culture and laws of Christian society. Rosalind's head and heart draw together perfectly; her humour lubricates all her faculties, and her occasional freedoms of speech deepen our sense of her innate delicacy. *Twelfth-Night* is typical of the middle period—calm, quiet, serene, in faultless style, with still, deep, retiring beauty like the heroine. The characters' diversities of temper and purpose act like mutual affinities. Sir Toby cheats Sir Andrew out of his money but into the proper felicity of his nature. Shakespeare meant to push the

joke against Malvolio so far as to make us sympathize with him and admit his worth. Olivia has enchanted the Duke's imagination, not won his heart. Viola's moral rectitude is so perfect and pure as to be a secret to itself. The conflict of opposites finally produces order and happiness.

The worth of Helena of *All's Well* appears by her impression on the good, and their goodness is heightened by sensibility to hers. Bertram's pride is seen to be stultifying because it makes him the easy dupe of a fool. We come to see him through her eyes and take his virtues on trust. *M. for M.* explores the foundation principles of ethics. Mariana puts new life into the whole and supplies the motive for Angelo's pardon. It is the only comedy where the wit sparkles up from a fountain of bitterness, the humour is sarcastic, and the poetry tragically austere. With Isabella the keen anguish of conflicting feelings vents itself in severity, which is unmerited, but discloses her noble character. The Duke had seen through Angelo, and disguises himself to unmask him; he might well have suspected such theatrical austerity. Angelo's interviews with Isabella bring him to a just vision of his inward self. Isabella dares to do anything that leaves her a clear conscience; she is perhaps the finest of Shakespeare's women. If her chastity is too demonstrative, it is due to her licentious surroundings. We can scarcely imagine how the ideal can be pushed further beyond nature than in the *Tempest*, and yet it is clothed with all the truth and life of nature. There is no gap between the natural and supernatural; they are continuous. Prospero the magician is made attractive by the father; his thoughts and aims seem at one with nature, so we acquiesce. His magic is that of virtue, and he transmutes wrongs done him into beneficent motives. Through Ariel, his thoughts become things and his volitions events. Caliban only recognizes the moral law as making for self; he sees the wrong done him but not the wrong he does. Union of man, demon, brute, prevent him from being either. Miranda visibly expresses the virtues and poetries of the place. She is rapt at Prospero's tale because for her the supernatural stands in the place of nature, and nothing seems so wonderful to her as the doings of men. Were Trinculo and Stephano withdrawn we should feel a want, because such things help to make up the mysterious whole of human life. Perhaps Leontes' allusion to the three months' delay, in the *W. Tale*, was made half bitterly, as if Hermione's long reluctance had planted in him a grain of doubt. Jealousy is not his habit of mind, since it takes him by surprise. Shakespeare wins our sympathy for him by making it his only fault, and his true character appears in his repentance. The charge goes to the depths of Hermione without ruffling the surface of her soul.

When kings and princes figure, it is to set us face to face with the real spirit and sense of the people. Shakespeare omits the intense hatred

of Popery of the older plays on *John* because a special purpose was inconsistent with the just proportions of art. The point was to disguise John's meanness and yet so order the disguise as to suggest that it covered something too vile to be seen. The anger of Constance mars her sorrow. *Richard II* embodies a scheme of political philosophy. What rightly constitutes a State? Because Richard's thoughts are personal and not general, his life clashes with the laws and conditions of his place. Bolingbroke is artful but also genuine; he knows the strength of the throne must stand in having the hearts of the people knit to it. Feelings that have been wont to go with the crown silently draw together and centre on him. He sinned in causing Richard's death, but the head and spring of all the evils was the usurpation—and for this Richard was equally to blame. The King in *Henry IV* is all study, forecast, and calm suiting of means to ends, yet the soul of moral sense and kernel of religion. In the Prince is centred every manly grace and virtue—and it is no disgrace to be charmed by Falstaff. He is not unhurt by the connexion and this does much to justify his final treatment of Falstaff. The ties are gradually sundered as the higher elements of his nature are called forth by great occasions. He wins his father's confidence; his manhood unfolds, and he discovers forces answering to all the attractions of Falstaff. The latter's treatment of Shallow justifies his dismissal by the Prince. The unity of *Henry V* is in the hero. The Welsh, Scottish, and Irish soldiers show national enmities reconciled, and all co-operating harmoniously, inspired by the King's noble character. Through Henry V Shakespeare reveals directly his own conception of the good and noble. Next to Hamlet, or perhaps as much, he is Shakespeare's most complex and many-sided character, great alike in thought, purpose, performance. He is never content unless he gets heart to heart with those about or beneath him. Inward merit is the only basis of kingship, and his supreme delight is to be just what he is. Therefore he disliked his father's part of dissimulation and policy and avoided the court. A special purpose in *Richard III* mars the organic symmetry. Such excess of life and energy seems rammed into his little body as to strain and bulge it out of shape. Moral obliquity so played as to pass for moral rectitude is to him the test and measure of intellectual strength and dexterity; for which cause he delights not only to practise it, but also to contemplate himself while practising it. He exerts his strong will even more to repress his own nature, and his dreams reveal the violence done to his nature.

The leading and unifying passion of love in *R. and J.* is so associated with others equally intense that we accept it as natural. Reason and passion are divorced, so that people calculate where they should be impassioned and are blindly passionate where they should be deliberate. *J.C.* shows us only the ambition of one who was the world's most practical genius. In the play he speaks out of character, but friends and

foes deliver him nearer truth. The murder of their beloved Caesar overcomes the Romans' hereditary aversion to kingship, so that his blood serves to hasten and cement the empire.

The enlarged *Hamlet* marks the spring of Shakespeare's philosophy which never after left him. Hamlet's character fills the play, but so as to develop, not repress, the others' characters. With superhuman power Shakespeare controls irregular and opposing forces, and uses them as elements of a higher order. All Hamlet's greatness goes to thought, made grander by a certain degree of mental disturbance. What affected him was the deeper sorrow of his mother's dishonour.<sup>1</sup> The power of the Ghost acts through the finest organs of the soul; and through Horatio are conveyed many of Hamlet's finest and noblest qualities. We get the whole science of human nature drawn together and condensed, and the play sweeps round the whole circle of human thought and passion. The Witches do not hate Macbeth personally; they are the purity of sin incarnate. They represent the mysterious action and reaction between evil mind and external nature. Morally, the world is a reflection of what we bring to it; and they do not deprave but develop the characters they act upon. Macbeth had premeditated the crime, and what entrances and appals him is the image of his moral self. His moral sense is not dead, and he mistakes inward pangs for outward perils. His over-wrought and self-accelerating imagination creates the terrible beauty of the play. Lady Macbeth's ferocity is assumed, and her swoon for the grooms is true, else she would have done it for the King. Deeds, not thoughts, kindle the furies in her soul. Their mutual respect even grows by their crimes, since these develop their inborn greatness. Sympathy deepens when their realized ambition brings so much sorrow. *Lear* is the highest specimen of the Gothic drama. The underplot broadens the basis, because superhuman-seeming evil impresses otherwise when supported by proper sympathies and associations. Lear's intellect develops equally with his passion; the upturning of his mind gives us his whole life in retrospect. It is no mere likeness of madness, but the thing itself. Cordelia pervades the play, though she is little seen and heard, and even when present we rather feel than see her. She never thinks of her piety, because her piety keeps her thoughts engaged upon her father. Her influence, like an undercurrent in the minds of others, circulates in their blood, and enriches their life with a beauty that seems their own, yet is not. In the Fool are fun and frolic sublimed and idealized into tragic beauty. Our estimate of the play depends on the view we take of him. His heart is slowly breaking, yet he never speaks of his own suffering.

*A. and C.* is truer to history in effect than the history is to itself. No play leaves a profounder impression of Shakespeare's greatness. The style has a kind of vital ecstasy; new light is struck from the very

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Richardson (1784).



hardness of what resists. With Antony and Cleopatra we do not think of any moral quality: they overshoot the whole region of duty and obligation. They are gods to themselves and each other, so their freedom is absolute.<sup>1</sup> Eastern notions of human apotheosis had invaded and leavened the Western mind. A god had been needed to control the Roman world, and Julius Caesar had been deified. Shakespeare grants them the benefit of this delusion, they do not transgress duty, but escape from it. Cleopatra's opposing traits are fused into perfect consistency by the heat of mutual friction. The wonder how she can so fascinate becomes a new fascination. In Charmian and Iras we see reflected her intense sexuality, which, if directly expressed, would have detracted from her fascination. *Cymbeline* shows the variety of the Gothic drama, in a tissue of counterplottings. The result is brought about by their defeat: as if to prove men are not masters of their lot. Chance prevailing over design gives the work a wild, romantic, legendary character. The moral beauty of Imogen radiates from herself to others, and her truth begets truth.

Iago acts from original malignity of nature: as we also see from his conduct to Roderigo. His pride of intellectual mastery is far stronger than his love of lucre. His opinions carry the weight of facts, as having forced themselves upon him against his will. His youth explains the trust that others have in him. He is a cold intellectual sensualist; his intellect has cast off all allegiance to moral reason and become a law to itself. The fact that he can do a thing is cause enough to do it; the motives of his soliloquies are an afterthought. Othello is not jealous by nature, but is converted by forged external proofs. In judging him we should proceed as if his wife were indeed guilty. He has solid and gentle qualities; he has not wronged Brabantio, but knows that he seems to have done so. His feelings take the old man's part, and he respects his age and sorrow too much to resent his abuse. We feel Desdemona's death scene less than that in which he strikes and abuses her, and makes us feel she has lost him. Like Cordelia, all the parts of her being speak in such harmony that the intellectual tones may not be distinctly heard. Shakespeare wonderfully preserves Othello in our sympathy and respect. The mischief does not work through any vice or weakness in him, but through such qualities as exalt him. *Coriolanus* is the essence of all ever written on the relative claims of aristocracy and democracy. It has nothing of the treatise, but history becomes pure drama. If he cannot be kind and courteous to the people, unless false to self, the more vicious his temper. Volumnia impersonates the woman's and mother's side of the Roman system, and tells much of the religious awe of motherhood. Only by men's thinking and acting as in presence of canonized forefathers can disorder be kept from extremes. . . .

Hudson helps the reader's insight into Shakespeare by discriminating

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Heraud.

the Gothic drama. Though he dismisses the classic drama rather too lightly, he does well to convince us that it is harder to transmute modern life into poetry. His statement that Shakespeare was the greatest poet because he was the best and wisest man and the truest Christian is questionable, yet we cannot discard it as easily as a few years ago. No doubt the moral sense is distinct from the aesthetic, but no one faculty works independently of the rest. But Hudson does over-stress the moral element, and this, with his too literal belief that Shakespeare's characters are real men and women, is the cause of his errors. Perhaps he admires Shakespeare too easily, like one who accepts a faith and dismisses every doubt—and hence he is over-ready to interpret all for the best. He wrongly explains the charm of *A.Y.L.*; he approaches Falstaff of the *Wives* from a wrong angle; he considers Isabella Shakespeare's finest woman character; he proclaims that the Duke had seen through Angelo. He is better in detecting the reactions of a character on its surroundings than its relations to another character. Thus he says well that Bolingbroke as usurper was artful but also genuine; that Shylock's avarice smacks of patriotism; and that Isabella's over-demonstrative chastity is due to her licentious surroundings—but he says badly that Henry V is Shakespeare's most complex and many-sided character next to Hamlet, and that the Witches do not hate Macbeth personally, and their crimes develop the inborn greatness of Macbeth and his wife; also that the anger of Constance mars her sorrow; and—to give one more instance—that Leontes remembered half bitterly Hermione's three months' delay. We must except from censure two of Hudson's more narrowly psychological statements; that Antonio's treatment of Shylock was a wrong done to himself; and that Hamlet was affected by the deeper sorrow of his mother's dishonour. He best unites the two in *A. and C.*, for character and surroundings are there most interdependent—and also in his fine remarks about Cordelia and the Fool. Where he succeeds he brings home to us the deeper unity which only Shakespeare could impose upon the complex Gothic drama.

## II

W. J. BIRCH'S treatise<sup>1</sup> aims to prove that Shakespeare is an utter sceptic and believes in no life beyond the grave. It is the work of a man without humour, with a preconceived plan into which he compels his instances to fit, who assumes that every character spoke Shakespeare's own sentiments. In Hamlet's most famous soliloquy he speaks of religion as something that weakens the will, like Lucretius. When Lear replies to Cordelia, 'Nothing will come of nothing', he speaks materialism of the same Lucretian type. In *Othello* Shakespeare argues through Emilia that if he had the whole world he could undo the vice

<sup>1</sup> *An Enquiry into the Philosophy and Religion of Sh.*, 1848.

and make the wrong the right—as if there were no future state. In *Hamlet* Purgatory is made ridiculous; and since Shakespeare introduced the Ghost to be the butt of Hamlet's jests, no doubt he meant to ridicule the supernatural appearance. The above quotations show the quality of the book, and as it has but a faint historic interest, it might well have been overlooked, but for a certain distinction which is worth recording. In *Richard III* and *Macbeth*, he says, Shakespeare depreciates religious and raises moral influences, seeking in the constitution of human nature, rather than in grace, the inducements to virtue. He maintains that Shakespeare delighted to illustrate the moral rather than divine government of the world, and assumed that the laws of morality were plainly written on the human heart. Iago is a perfect necessitarian, and the natural opposition roused by the ingratitude of Goneril and Regan shows how deeply Shakespeare believed in the natural laws of morality. Mercy being 'twice blessed' is a beautiful idea of the existence of natural morality in general. The words of Lady Macbeth, 'Yet do I fear thy nature', is a tribute to the love in the hearts of all mankind. In *Cymbeline* he makes virtue fairer than vice and forgiveness better than revenge.

### III

N. J. HALPIN<sup>1</sup> writes of Shakespeare's treatment of time—a unity as artistic as the ancients', and far more illusive. Measured by hours, it never exceeds a *watch*, that is, forty-eight or fifty-six hours; but he throws it into perspective, as the painter treats space, and suggests far more to the imagination. Thus he has a double series of time or dates—the illusory and the real, the protractive and the accelerating. The time of the *Merchant* is said to be three months, but it is thirty-nine hours. The bond is thought to be for three months, but Shylock substituted one payable at sight; otherwise, Antonio with his many friends and unlimited credit, could have produced the money. In order to protract, Shakespeare takes advantage of the first impression of three months, and he conveys a corresponding remoteness in time by the vague idea of the distance between Belmont and Venice suggested by the sea voyage—and also by the number of suitors, and by Tubal's false statement that he went to Genoa, &c. All the plays are written on this system. . . .

It is an ingenious theory, but the facts of the *Merchant* prove that the bond was for three months. Halpin's criticism was of the mid-nineteenth-century type which insists that Shakespeare was as true to the letter as the spirit. Carlyle said finely that Shakespeare's plays were truer than reality, but to critics of less genius the provinces of imagination and reality were as yet imperfectly delimited. Neverthe-

<sup>1</sup> *The Dramatic Unities of Sh.*, 1849.

less, by pointing out his power to create the illusion of long time, as a painter does with space, Halpin has strengthened the ever-growing belief in Shakespeare as the supreme artist.

## IV

JOHN WILSON<sup>1</sup> pursues the same theme but more finely, relating it to deeper needs. Othello was Governor of Cyprus for two days—but long time is cunningly insinuated. Desdemona pleading for Cassio speaks of ‘a man that languishes in your displeasure’, and conveys the heart-sickness of protracted time. ‘O curse of marriage!’ is the language of a some-time married man. Iago has wooed Emilia to steal the handkerchief *a hundred* times. That Emilia should die for Desdemona witnesses time, as love and faith and fidelity had to be created in her. This last is the finest touch, helping us to realize that the unity of Shakespeare is no mechanical thing, but goes deep into the nature of his persons.

Probability requires extended time—to convert Othello and accumulate proofs; but the passionate expectation of the audience required rapid movement.. The solution is the Tremendous Double Time at Cyprus. The passion was precipitated in fifteen hours, yet the audience believe Othello governed Cyprus for months. The two Times alternately possess you; and when Othello and Iago debate you feel succession—as cause and effect must succeed—but you do not compute hours and days.

## V

THE gist of Charles Knight’s<sup>2</sup> criticism is that there is a unity beyond sight of the naked eye in Shakespeare’s plays, which needs the glass of contemplation to bring home to us. With his all-penetrating power of combination that sustains action and never breaks down into description, like his fellow-dramatists, he shows us a higher life than ordinary nature, and deep truths before dimly seen. He advanced by a tentative process, and struggled to reconcile the popular and true. The drama in England was created while he lived, and he took it as he found it. When he wrote *Titus* it had no poetry—but in *Tamora* appears powerful intellect and moral depravity. He had a large and general inspiration, and a power to conceive situations with reference to characters. The first sketch of *Hamlet* contains all the action of the play that was afterwards perfected. The tragedy of blood is now hidden in an atmosphere of poetry and philosophy. The peculiar theory of his mature judgement was that the terrible should be held in solution by the beautiful. *Verona* shows the absorbing and purifying power of his invention; the elegance of the young poet aiming to be

<sup>1</sup> *Blackwood*, Nov. 1849, May 1850. Also *New Sh. Society Transactions*, 1875-6; and *ibid.*, 1877-9, Appendix iii.

<sup>2</sup> *Studies of Sh.*, 1849.

correct rather than the splendours of the perfect artist. The characters are in pairs, and delicately contrasted; and the whole is experimental. The Christian spirit of charity first appears in Valentine. Only Shakespeare could build on a plan which gave fitness and proportion to incongruous parts. Launce is the first of Shakespeare's clowns, and surpassed those of previous writers. No dramatic action is more skilfully managed than that of the *Errors*, and the distinctions between the characters are made with force and delicacy. In *L. L. L.* the fine natures of the king and lords shine through their affectations. The beauty of Helena's character in *All's Well* is its intensity—her all-enduring, all-risking love. From the feeling that her labour is unwomanly, Shakespeare relieves us by the compassion that she inspires in the Countess. In the *Shrew*, with great skill, Shakespeare convinces us that Petruchio's character is assumed.

*Richard II* is the tragedy of pity, and shows the proximate and final causes of this world's success or loss. Poetic power is subjected to the higher law of truth—poetic truth, i.e. highest truth. Our pity is founded on Richard's passionate weakness, and Shakespeare shows us the fallen man as well as fallen king. He also indicates his faults as much as is needed to qualify our pity for his fall. He is the truest historian in all that belongs to the higher attributes of history. Richard's character is subordinated to the poetical conception of it—above historical propriety yet including it. Only a higher region than perfect command over the elements of strong individualization could produce Richard's infirmities and endear him because they are near to the beauties of his character. In *Henry IV* also is there higher poetical truth of conception, and Shakespeare divests traditional dissipation of its grossness. All parts, including the comic, are interdependent, and the minute shades of character and contradictions in Falstaff are reconciled by reference to connexion with the action. The Prince's profligacy is akin to his higher energy; this is effected by the peculiar qualities of his own mind and his associates'. Characters and incidents cannot live apart. Hotspur's force of will rises into poetry even by its own chafings; he is the Prince's good destiny to fire his ambition. The descriptions in *Henry V* are alien from the spirit of Shakespearian drama, and the play is too narrow for Shakespeare's peculiar powers; but it has lyric grandeur, and the King is a finished portrait. It is a philosophical and consistent appreciation of the moral and intellectual progress of the Prince. Also it embodies national heroism: one of those periods in the history of a people when their nationality lifts them into a frenzy of enthusiasm and is one of the sublimest exhibitions of the practical poetry of social life. The picture of the sacked city corrects false nationality. *Henry VI* shows events progressing without their consequences, and produces belief in fate. Future is linked to present with masterly skill. *John* gives the sublime contrast of Constance's

natural affection over the pomp of regal ambition. We bear her in mind in the after-scenes where Arthur appears, and her spirit is appeased by the King's fall.

In *M.N.D.* there is absolute originality in the blending of fairy machinery with 'human mortals' among the persons of the drama. In *R. and J.* passion and imagination sublimates all that is literal and common in human action and thought—and sense is raised to soul. The *Merchant* shows the anomalies between the circumstances that surround human agents and the higher motives by which they should act. It is the basis of the play's large toleration amid seeming intolerance. Men should be judged by a higher principle than that of edicts. In *M. Ado* appears a real aspect of things seen by the audience but not by the agents. In *A.Y.L.* there are no set descriptions of nature, like the scene-painting in Lodge's play. As we have nothing definite we pass more readily into the imaginative. The real is so blended with the poetical that the highest poetry appears natural as familiar gossip—and lofty philosophy mingling with daily life teaches us the philosophical aspect of commonest things. We learn the vanity of things that bind us to the world, but that in cultivating the affections we gain happiness. In *Twelfth-Night* highest poetry is welded with the most intense fun. The poetic and comic are not presented as opposite principles in patchwork union, but one and the same creation of the highest imaginative power. They work together in Viola and Malvolio to produce a harmonious effect.

The subject of *M. for M.* is scarcely dramatic, and it leaves an unsatisfactory impression. The obscurity of *Hamlet* is part of its sublimity. His 'large discourse', his 'looking before and after' absorbed the tangible and present. We blame him not for causing Ophelia's ruin, because her destiny was involved in his. The grave-digger scene is made impressive by the entire absorption of the Clown who 'has no feeling of his business' in the rich meditations of him of 'daintier sense'. Othello would have been truly wise had he trusted to his own pure impulses. What a contrast is Cordelia's small part and her all-pervading influence!<sup>1</sup> She personifies the holiness of womanhood. In *Macbeth* superstition is made to harmonize with the action, and is poetical. The poetry of the action keeps the horror within the bounds prescribed by high art. The last scene of Act I where Macbeth considers the secondary consequences of crime, and forgets the real question, is the step from innocence to guilt, is more terrible than the murder scene. It shows how men fall by their own weakness and the bad strength of others. Shakespeare's imagination lifts his deep philosophy into the highest poetry. Lady Macbeth lacked imagination; and Macbeth's poetic temperament limits and mitigates the horror of the tragedy. Few poets, like Shakespeare, would join the terrible and

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Hudson.

beautiful, and preserve the energy of the former. The beauty of the mountain scenes in *Cymbeline* subserves the peculiarities of the characters.

Not the *Tempest* but the Roman plays are the latest, and in these we get the philosophical and historical aspect of human affairs more than the passionate and imaginative. Rome informs every scene: young Rome in *Coriolanus*, with its terrible energy of rising ambition choked by class violence. \*The Rome of *J.C.* shows glories about to perish in the domestic conflict of principles; of *A. and C.*, through the selfishness of individuals. In *J.C.* six lines better describe Cicero than all Ben Jonson's transcripts from Tacitus and Suetonius. In *J.C.* Shakespeare saw the exact relations of the contending principle to the future great history of mankind. Caesar's death was that of the Republic. . . .

The aim of the above analysis has been to touch those points only which illustrate Knight's innermost theory: that the finest knowledge is imaginative. Poetry is truer than history or philosophy because it includes them; it is somewhat akin to the Ideas or Absolutes of Plato. But just as the eighteenth-century critics insisted on Shakespeare's 'truth to nature', so Knight insists that this finer world is not remote from ours, but interpenetrates it. Like a suddenly revealed gorgeous sunset streaming across western lands, it is level with our earthly homes. Witness his remarks on the union of comic and tragic in *Twelfth-Night* or *Henry IV*, on the supernatural in *M.N.D.* or *Macbeth*, on the grave-digger scene in *Hamlet*. He tells us that the finer natures of the king and lords in *L.L.L.* shine through their affectations; that Hotspur's force of will rises into poetry by its own chafings; that the obscurity of *Hamlet* is part of its sublimity; that Macbeth's poetic temperament mitigates the horror of the tragedy. Morals touch him, as they do all critics of his time, but he has the larger power of one who has withdrawn beyond them, deeper into himself, and on return swept them easily into his scheme. No critic had shown till now that Shakespeare was one of ourselves, and yet possessed a knowledge surpassing the greatest ancient or modern thinker. At times he errs in applying his theory with too little discrimination to plays such as *Titus* or *1 Henry VI*. Satisfied with the arguments that Shakespeare found the drama without poetry and his own progress was gradual, he too readily overlooks what is plainly un-Shakespearian.

## VI

TO Thomas Macnight<sup>1</sup> the object of the drama is to represent human life as it is; and, starting with the external world, he works back to the genius of Shakespeare. The English historical plays reveal to him the high and noble spirit of the old English people. They explain the cause

<sup>1</sup> *Prize Essay on Historical Plays of Sh.*, 1850.

of England's greatness, and also the English character. He mingled tragedy and comedy in *Henry IV*, because in life we find both together, and he is the dramatist of real life. Falstaff has many hateful qualities, yet we do not hate him, because his mind is always active, and wine clears his brain and fills it with ideas. In *Henry V* one cause of English superiority is the chasm between the French nobles and people. *Henry VIII* is the surest index of Shakespeare's mind, because we are made to see clearly what is to be admired in an enemy and regretted in a friend.

On the whole, Shakespeare most appeals to Macnight as a moralist. He tells us that in *Henry IV* Shakespeare shows with surpassing skill how little happiness is really connected with the greatest worldly advantages, and we should therefore be contented with our lot; and that in *Richard III* the cry of rage and indignation roused by the murder of the Princes shows such crimes were not as common as supposed, and though the upper extremity of the political body might be corrupt, the great national heart was sound.

## VII

THOMAS GRINFIELD<sup>1</sup> is another rather one-sided critic, who is concerned with the moral question. He would exchange many of the comic pages for a corresponding increase of wise and solemn passages. We will not dispute his general statements that Shakespeare's moral wisdom equals his poetic beauty and dramatic power, or that he is the merriest and wisest of laughing philosophers, but he fails in particular application. He says that each of the four great tragedies contains a prolonged and powerful exhibition of one master passion, as embodied in the leading personage; that Desdemona is punished for disobeying her father, and Othello for robbing her father of her; that there is a world of wit, spirit, and easy cleverness in *T. and C.* . . . Obviously it is the criticism of one who, having a preconceived plan, works by simple and direct impressions, and contributes nothing of his inner mind. It has, therefore, only an historical interest.

## VIII

WALTER BAGEHOT'S<sup>2</sup> object is to get at Shakespeare's self, and he adopts the common-sense method; a method less trustworthy than it appears, but peculiarly suited to himself. A great critic, with the finest taste, much knowledge of extra-literary matters, and keenly interested in life, he keeps life and literature before him in parallel lines. He says positively that it is thought we do not know Shakespeare, yet of no one is there a clearer picture in the popular fancy. He had a

<sup>1</sup> *Remarks on the Moral Influence of Sh.'s Plays*, 1850.    <sup>2</sup> *Sh. the Man*, 1853.



first-rate imagination and first-rate experience, and to prove the latter he takes as an instance the hare in *Venus* with its constant, sudden, almost unconscious allusion. Bagehot then compares Shakespeare and Scott with Goethe in such a way as to bring home to us something of Shakespeare's nature. To describe people, he says, you must comprehend their essential features; it is not a question of imagination, fancy, or mind at all; but you must be able to appreciate mere clay. Goethe's characters are only literary studies, though he had imagination, and mixed with all kinds of men. But he was not of them, he was not absorbed like Scott or Shakespeare. Shakespeare had patient sympathy and kindly fellow-feeling for the humble: e.g. Dogberry and Verges. It is said he was a first-rate link-boy, and you feel he could have been a link-boy. If any one doubts Shakespeare's liveliness let them consider Falstaff. A morose man could have conceived his rotundity of body but not of mind: everything pleases him and is food for a joke. But he also has a solitary life, and though a popular author, has a refining element of chastening sensibility. Seldom is the power for musing solitude combined with observation. He had a feeling of loyalty to the polity of his country—not because it was good, but because it existed. He was the poet of personal nobility; he disbelieved in the middle classes and made his 'citizens' and business men absurd. He had good-tempered sense and ill-tempered sense, and he reveals the latter in his delightful unmasking of the hypocrite Angelo. Much nonsense has been talked about his learning; he was a happy and pleased reader of books that interested him—a natural reader. As to his religion, if this world is not all evil, he who understood and painted it best must probably have some good. England lay before him—and its past, and he saw in it a great unity, a great religious object. . . .

The straightforward, common-sense method, as we said, may be dangerous, but Bagehot's culture was not only personal but inherited, and therefore deeply rooted. It would have resisted with unconscious mass had he let living experience predominate too much over literature in critical matters. All that he says is true, but when the stimulus of his words has ceased our minds take up their former agnostic position. He has helped us to realize, but the cloud remains upon the mountain-top. Thoughts of the past may flit barrenly through the mind, and can neither console nor distress unless they bring a corresponding outer object: and so it does not suffice to know general opinions and the main facts of a life, but to divine the secret of a personality we must have concrete single instance. Bagehot's equal knowledge of life and literature appears forcibly in his analysis of Angelo—whose passions, he says, had disguised themselves and retreated far into his character, to recur more dangerously when the proper period is expired, and the world, and even himself, are impressed with sure reliance on his virtue.

## IX

GRANT WHITE<sup>1</sup> wishes to prove that the obvious meaning of Shakespeare's poetry is the true one; that editors and commentators have done much to obscure it; that Shakespeare wrote his plays to be acted, not read, and his audience never failed to understand them. It is a point of view not unnatural to those who have inherited a younger tradition of culture, but it lends itself at times to facile and obvious judgements: e.g. that Jaques is a morose, cynical, querulous old fellow, who has been a bad young one; though he contributes something by discovering that it is not Jaques who pities the deer, but the First Lord who utters the touching description. He is sensitive to the beauty in Shakespeare, but in his passion for common sense he isolates the character from the play, and treats it realistically. He is at his best when praising a character by comparison. Thus, for him, Mariana's power to plead exceeds Isabella's; her prayer for Angelo makes his crime worse and herself more lovable. And while Isabella shelters herself behind laws and bars, Imogen opposes a libertine by her inherent but unobtruded modesty. Neither Viola, Portia, nor Imogen would have treated a brother as did Isabella. He is also well served by common sense when he opposes the popular criticism, that Shakespeare lacked sympathy with the people. He maintains that Shakespeare was a dramatic artist, and when he portrays men of a class, he makes them the type of a class as they existed.

## X

WILLIAM WATKISS LLOYD<sup>2</sup> finds in Shakespeare the deepest passion, the purest pathos, the most ethereal poetry, the profoundest characterization—also, unwavering ethical purpose, and deep philosophical insight. No one will contradict these general statements, but if Shakespeare's greatness has been thus experienced, it should heighten the critic's power to impress the reader with it. In the present case this has not been done, and we get a cold analysis quite divorced from the vision which the above selected statements would lead one to think had been revealed. He treats the emotion given off by the dramatic situation as the ordinary emotion of daily life, not the intenser kind suggested by art. As he has no central theory like Knight we cannot drive a main road through his country, but must content ourselves with instances of his method. The rule of Shakespeare's dramatic writing, he says, is natural truthfulness. He sought his fable in times where superficial manners contrasted with his own, but he made it the mirror of modern times—the passions, interests, motives, virtues and vices that prevailed. There is something in this

<sup>1</sup> *Sh.'s Scholar*, 1854 (New York).

<sup>2</sup> *Essays on Life and Plays of Sh.* Contributed to Singer's edit., 1856.

of the 'truth to nature' of the earlier critics. The horrors of *Macbeth* interest, he says, because the passions are set forth so naturally that we recognize their germ in ourselves.

He is at his best with the historical and Roman plays, where the general idea which he discovers is strong enough to enliven the outer parts. For him, nationality begins with the reign of John, and each historical play embodies the fortunes and destinies of England, as affected by the character and position of its special king. The chief theme is the disputed succession to the throne, but the deeper origin is the half-barbarous state of society. The great authority of a king is required, with first-rate abilities, and the lack of these leads to depositions and factions, &c. Amid such chaos the hope and promise of ultimate order is found in the appearance of that spirit which the nation has always proudly called its own: concern of English honour at foreign interference. The fortunes of John and Elinor, though selfish, are national—while Constance and Arthur engage our personal sympathies. The evil set forth is unpatriotic concession to foreign powers from personal motives. Falconbridge impersonates loyalty, and the promise of a happier form of constitutional government. Magna Carta is not mentioned, but its genius is infused into the play.

Dealing with the Roman plays, he finds in *Coriolanus* the gist of all ever written on the relative positions of aristocracy and democracy. Rome is preserved from cleaving in the midst by the virtues of the State—the reverence of both parties for her political majesty. The nobles never dream of foreign aid, but Coriolanus is the type of future trouble. When corruption has sapped domestic virtues, his selfish and personal impulses will proceed unchecked. Through all the levities and violences Shakespeare conveys a prevailing impression of the majesty of Rome. Brutus impersonates the highest Roman moral sense; and Cassius is redeemed by his power to sympathize with ideal virtue and heroic friendship. The pathos is the defeat of all that is most personally estimable and valuable in the State of Rome, and we see a great era dying before us. With *A. and C.*, where personal predominates over political, Lloyd is less successful. He admits the events to be interesting, but he finds neither awe nor pity in the catastrophe, and he calls Antony's passion for Cleopatra spurious, and imagines it to foreshadow the large future of the Roman Empire—the disorders of Nero or Caligula. He therefore does not convince when he says finally that every line is charged with the maturest autumn of a ripened mind, and from no other play could a line be struck out less easily.

Where the unity of a play is neither historical nor political, but deeper—that is, moral or psychological or aesthetic—Lloyd fails to see it, and follows false trails, and his impressions of scenes and characters lack a sure foundation. He sees in the underplot of *Lear* only a

father injured by his son, to balance the idea of the main plot—a father injured by his daughters. In the *W. Tale* Hermione unites the power of the two contrasted portions—the tragic and comic. The pastoral scenes surprise us as much as the jealousy of Leontes after his exaggerated hospitality. The selfishness of the old man and his son finally detaches Perdita from them in our associations. The supernatural in *Hamlet* does not remove the subject from ordinary nature, and the humanity of the play is independent of the supernatural world. In the dupes of Falstaff—Quickly and Shallow—we see the same weak reliance that betrayed the Archbishop of York. Pistol's mock at the leek is not unconnected with the Dauphin's mock with tennis-balls. Lloyd blames Othello for trusting his friend more than his wife, but ignores Iago's matchless dialectic skill. He says that, in his wooing-tale, Othello played on Desdemona's credulity, as he himself was afterwards wrought on, and that he had some mental traits of the negro; among them, he loved high-sounding words. Richard III hankers for the crown with the diseased imagination that dwells on the metallic symbol of royalty as a personal ornament to compensate for natural personal defects.

Yet there are some good things among his isolated criticisms. Timon has an eager and craving appetite for the blind sensations of friendship; he despises the gold he finds because it cannot purchase the only good for the sake of which he ever valued it. The sting of Macbeth's apprehension resides in his inner consciousness that his crime is heinous. In *Richard III* all hangs on the internal and moral crisis, not the external reverse. Retribution is from within, and death in battle bravely borne is nothing. The commonplace grieving household over Juliet's supposed death completes the picture of society, and gains a living reality for ideal and poetic love. In *M. Ado* Claudio's proxy wooing makes his later conduct grate less than if we had seen the mutual melting of the pair.

## XI

THE work of Henry Reed<sup>1</sup> belongs to the same year as that of Watkiss Lloyd, and there are some likenesses between the two, though Reed is the finer critic. In the beginning he insists that creative imagination is needed to give lifelike reality to history, to make us think and feel with others, to connect facts that seem to stand apart by moral association. A pervading idea, he says, is needed to blend all parts into unity, and, like Watkiss Lloyd, he finds that *John* inspires a deep and fervid spirit of nationality, that England is the great and ever-present idea of the play. Shakespeare's moral view is that, however separated are events in time, all after-misery is penal retribution for the murder of Arthur. The civil war is traced back to the elements of its moral

<sup>1</sup> *Lectures on English History and Tragic Poetry as Illustrated by Sh., 1856.*

origin, the eight plays are like acts of one tragedy, and amid all the changes we see the workings of justice: the varied and splendid teachings of the lessons of retributive justice.

So far it is Shakespeare's purely moral teaching, confined to this world, that Reed disengages from the plays. His insight grows when he deals with the tragedies, and he remembers his first saying of the part played by the imagination in stimulating the moral sense. He still maintains that the great poet is a true moralist; but, thanks to his understanding of moral unity and the function of the imagination, he begins to perceive the higher unity of the good, the true, and the beautiful—by a kind of critical spectrum analysis. Thus he says that Lear is hardened by absolute power, even his resignation is despotic, and he thinks he can command his children's affections; and that the tragedy teaches the restoration of his moral nature. In *Macbeth*, imagination unites the world of nature and the world beyond; we see the firm tread of the armed soldier and the noiseless gliding of ghosts. The Witches coexist naturally with human passions, and typify something real. When Duncan and Banquo arrive at Macbeth's castle, we see the harmony that Shakespeare creates between the material and spiritual worlds. Shakespeare excludes Macbeth's children because the presence of a child would have aggravated the crime beyond tragic emotion and the imagination's power to harmonize. *Hamlet* carries us into the illimitable, eternal, and universal region of human nature, beyond passion and thought—the soul—the greatest of all mysteries—the imperishable principle of personality of each one of us. *Othello* is a fearful speculation regarding human nature, and brings to light the darkest and lowest region of human wickedness. Iago is tempted to crime by pleasurable consciousness of power, and the natural antagonism of the base to the noble nature. There is also the fascination of crime, like that which comes to one who looks down a precipice. Unlike Watkiss Lloyd, Reed says that proofs are forced on Othello's mind like demonstration. He concludes that the tragedy is no mere warning against jealousy, because Shakespeare's moral was far deeper, since his works were of pure imagination—the mind's noblest faculty.

## XII

OF a book like John Charles Bucknill's,<sup>1</sup> we naturally ask whether its special knowledge helps us to understand better Shakespeare's aesthetic power. The following extracts will satisfy the reader that it does. The key-note is that abnormal states of mind were Shakespeare's favourite study, and that he uses characters like Hamlet, Lear, Timon, Ophelia, Constance, as the motley favourites of old courts were often used, to speak bitter truth without fear or favour.<sup>2</sup> If a supernatural appearance is possible, he says, there is no doubt it would shake Macbeth's

<sup>1</sup> *The Psychology of Sh.*, 1859.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Garve (1796).

mind to the foundations. The mental physiologist, who is concerned more with nerve and brain than conscience and will, cannot exclude supernatural influences. Our interest depends on conflicting emotions of sympathy with a man struggling under fearful temptation. He has excessive imagination and tendency to hallucination. His wavering shows that he does fear the life to come, and his fears are not merely prudential, but he truly pities Duncan. Such is the progress of the morbid action that he at once accepts Banquo's ghost as reality, and he saves himself from insanity by decisive action.

Hamlet's profound life-weariness and suicidal desire show his emotions to be morbid from the first. Yet his mind is not off its poise for good, as his rapid recovery and self-possession in action show. His mania is mischievous, reckless, wayward, mingled with flashes of native wit, and disguised by a ground colour of real melancholy. In talk with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, he conveys exquisitely the state of the melancholiac (*melancholia without delusion*), who sees things as they are, but feels them as they are not. He sees the Ghost, yet doubts a future life;<sup>1</sup> but it is well known that completest sensational and intellectual proofs are nothing when opposed by the stubborn strength of a morbid emotion. Faith in God and a future life are ingrained in his mind and influence his conduct, yet he reasons on the future life and hunts matter through its changes with sceptical intent. His comments on the death of Polonius reveal the groundwork of unsound emotion on which the almost superhuman intellectual activity is founded. His outburst at the grave is pure madness—the rage of passion, not grief. Men of thought and action differ not in will but desire.

While Lear controls passion his imagination is comparatively dull; but when his emotional expression is unbridled, his majestic flow of burning words finds vent. He becomes the fierce Titan of passion, seeing clearly into the heart of man, with vast stores of life science, and large grasp of morals and polity, making known, like one inspired, the heights and depths of human nature. Shakespeare stresses the fact that emotional disturbance is the primary cause and condition of insanity, and intellectual disorders secondary. Lear has enjoyed unlimited authority for eighty years, and hence opposition seems to him monstrous and unnatural. His first speeches in the storm are the same as before, and not till physical suffering is added to moral is his mind overthrown: such was Shakespeare's exact knowledge of mental disease. His is acute mania, with rapid flow of ideas and tendency to incoherence. He is wide as human nature in his passions of love and hate, sympathy and censure. His restoration is not complete, as a less skilled writer would have it; the moral disturbance remains, and he now loves Cordelia without measure, as before he hated Goneril.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Hartley Coleridge.

Timon likewise has no ungratified wish, and is driven mad by concurring physical and moral causes. His delusion is that because some men are bad, so are all; and his belief in man's utter unworthiness redeems his misanthropy from petty spite. With Constance, fierce passion is the cause of her madness, not the result. Hers is the type of acute reasoning mania, and proves even more than Lear that Shakespeare held the origin and nature of insanity to be emotional. It is perfect art founded on exact observation.

Of more purely aesthetic criticisms, we would do well to remark that on Ophelia. Shakespeare says nothing of herself, yet we seem to look into the recesses of her clear soul. The character so seizes our sympathies as to leaven our regard for the whole play, which would be too much one of thought and opinion without her. . . .

This last extract confirms the main suggestion of this valuable treatise—that Shakespeare's knowledge exceeded that of the conscious mind. The author may speak of perfect art and exact observation, but in the main it is the witness of an expert to slowly acquired scientific truths anticipated by the intuition of genius. He uses Shakespeare's knowledge of abnormal mental states as a ladder to mount towards the upper air of criticism, away from poetic justice, man-made moral codes, unities, &c. He touches rightly Macbeth's reasons for wavering—his pity for Duncan and stings of conscience, not only thought of honour. With his enlarged views on mind and soul, we might helpfully compare Reed's criticism of Hamlet.

### XIII

BIRCH called Shakespeare a great moral writer, in whom natural morality supersedes religion; Wilson says that his drama is built on man's moral nature and terrestrial manner of being; and to Watkiss Lloyd he shows the sanctions of morality possessing full and independent force, and right and duty attaching to the laws of nature. Against Birch, both Knight and Macnight speak of his pervading Christian charity; Hudson says that he had Christian faith in a future life, and conceived character in the Christian spirit that the miserable man is he who does not suffer wrong; and Bucknill, that faith in God and immortality were ingrained in Hamlet's mind—and, moreover, he thinks that Hamlet was directly expressing Shakespeare's own profoundest meditations; Bagehot, that he saw in England and its past a great unity and religious object.

Hudson says that he overcame the difficulties of the drama, which is the greatest thing a human being has done in art, and unified a multitude of things; Halpin, that he surpassed the ancients and the French in unity of time; Wilson, that his omnipotent art bound in unity the most refractory times, things, persons, and events; Knight, that he made unity of feeling his own and excelled all others in making incongruous

actions and persons produce an entire and undisturbed effect; and Grant White, that he was the genius who bound antagonistic powers together without destroying their individual strength. According to Hudson, he effected this by his unifying power of imagination, but he also perceived intuitively the laws of mind beyond science, and was so familiar with nature that he needed not learning or experience, but saw beyond his characters to Nature herself. Bagehot says simply and tersely that he had a first-rate imagination and first-rate experience. It seemed to Knight that he showed us a higher life than ordinary nature, searching into the most hidden and obscure things in men's characters and motives, exploring the most unfathomable mysteries of the world around and beyond us, uniting the highest poetical conception with the most truthful delineation of real life, his imaginative power penetrating all his materials; while Grinfield calls him the first imaginative genius extant; Grant White says how his imagination, philosophy, and sober thought are marvellously interfused; Reed, that his works consist of pure imagination—man's noblest faculty; Wilson, that his drama reflects life itself and persuades us reality is immense and stupendous; to Bucknill he is the modern Aristotle, with all the knowledge of his time. As philosopher, he surpassed all in his power to discern men's passions, in the words of Hudson—his judgement equalled his genius, and he won his place as the greatest of human intellects by severe and patient thought; Macnight says that he had reflected deeply on all the great mysteries of life, and surpassed all ancient writers in philosophy, that he was the greatest moralist as well as dramatist; Grinfield, likewise, that the moral interest equals the poetic or dramatic; Watkiss Lloyd, that he had unwavering ethical purpose and deep philosophic insight; and Reed, that his moral wisdom was one great element.

Of Shakespeare's women we get the following opinions; Hudson's, that they give the moral element of the beautiful its fullest and fairest expression—that his divine gallery of womanhood is humanity's most precious inheritance next to the Christian religion; Knight's, that he has preserved for ever the ideal elevation of women, and conceives the female character in a refined and delicate manner; Grant White's, that he has created the most captivating and truly feminine women in the whole range of literature; Bucknill's, that all his women are feminine, even those with coarser passions; while Reed speaks of his matchless company of women. Bagehot makes the original point that he knew women well, but rather from imagination than experience.

On the subject of humour, we have Grinfield's remark that he is the merriest and wisest of laughing philosophers; and Reed's counter-remark, that the upper air of poetry is the atmosphere of sorrow, and laughter has to do with the surface; and we recall Carlyle's beautiful saying, that Shakespeare had known deep sorrows, but exaggerated only



in laughter. Hudson mentions his power of broad and varied combination; Knight discovers this same power of combination that sustains action, and says that he never breaks down into description, that we never hear his own voice; and Reed says that he never explains his characters, but creates and sets them before us in speech and action. Like Spalding and Hallam, Knight speaks of his obscurity, and he agrees with Spalding that the cause of it is conciseness. Hudson discovers in him an impartial and disinterested aesthetic conscience; and Watkiss Lloyd says that he recognized in art the same rigour as science. Another parallel between the last two is Hudson's remark that the upturning of *Lear's* mind gives a retrospect of his whole life; and Watkiss Lloyd's, that in one scene Shakespeare can show the impress of the past life of each character. Hudson says that passion develops *Lear's* intellect, and that the Fool in *Lear* is the gauge and exponent of all the characters about him; and Bucknill, that madmen are his broadest exponents of humanity. Noteworthy single remarks are Reed's, that Shakespeare revered the beauty and holiness of childhood, and had few instances of male friendship—and those few, like Hamlet and Horatio, distinguished by difference of character. . . .

The outstanding critics of these twelve years are Knight, Bagehot, and Bucknill. Knight has a delicate touch—Bagehot is original, though more from habit of mind than because he has special knowledge of his subject—Bucknill has made good use of objective truths of mental science. Of the remainder it cannot be said that their achievement is a great one; they have taken Shakespeare's reputation on trust from their predecessors, and they continue to explore a little further down well-known thoroughfares. They enlarge on his greatness as moralist and philosopher—on his imagination—his power to draw characters, both men and women—his skill as dramatic craftsman—and with few exceptions they call him a Christian. Yet there is a note of hearsay rather than basic experience in their criticism; the impression is not given that their minds have been absorbed by Shakespeare's and come forth with new truths to tell, but rather that each finds in Shakespeare what he himself brings—especially in their inquiries into the nature of his imagination.

## Chapter XIV

### ENGLAND 1863-1868

- I. COWDEN CLARKE. II. KENNY. III. CHARLES WORDSWORTH.  
IV. MASSON. V. HERAUD. VI. KELLOGG. VII. MASSEY. VIII. GILES.  
IX. LOWELL. X. SIMPSON. XI. CONCLUSION.

#### I

CHARLES COWDEN CLARKE,<sup>1</sup> like Ben Jonson, loves Shakespeare this side of idolatry, but, unlike Ben Jonson, he is consistent enough to find no fault. He considers Shakespeare the greatest ethical and imaginative writer—the most perfect artist, in whose finished work no trace of effort shows—the most humble and sweet-natured Christian, trusting in the goodness of God and his fellow-creatures. The result is that a book which contains many good things is stretched beyond the author's powers as a whole. In examining the plays singly and systematically he is obvious and uninspired when his sympathy fails. When it works, he is at his best in contributing something to our suspended judgements of one side of a great character, or explaining the part played by a minor character in enhancing the total effect of a play.

He says that Macbeth is irresolute and seeks support from accomplices, that his indecision is that of a soul unhardened in guilt—and because he is swayed by his feelings he enlists our sympathies. Duncan's qualities shine forth so beautifully that Macbeth is nearly deterred. Hamlet is not didactic but reflects for himself rather than for others; his philosophy is without set rule but flows from his own spiritual being. Horatio is the one bright spot of the play; he is entirely disinterested and becomes Hamlet's moral executor. Cordelia is reticent and speaks aside, which shows a habit of self-communing rather than overt expression, and we know her through others. The externals of the natures of Goneril and Regan are tactfully subdued when they are in contact with Lear. Between them is a difference of mind-manner, and Regan is the coarser. Lest Jaques should be thought an authority, Shakespeare, who mistrusted melancholy, reveals to us his former character. He is untouched by adversity, while the Duke has cause to complain, but is always cheerful. Celia is hardly less witty than Rosalind, but suppresses it to let Rosalind's wit show more. Hers is voluntary non-speech, and in sacrificing herself she seems to fulfil her own pleasure. Page of the *Merry Wives* is Shakespeare's truest Englishman, whose every thought of the heart and motion of the body is the result of pure instinct. In the little non-essentials of conduct and character Slender is no perfect fool. In *Twelfth-Night* Shakespeare's reverence

<sup>1</sup> *Sh.'s Characters, chiefly those Subordinate*, 1863.

for real refinement in women redeems Olivia, who is the seeker, from anything masculine. Viola's disguise and likeness to her brother test our faith, but one should read Shakespeare with kindred simplicity of heart and relish for the romance of life. Maria has no female companion and is thrown for fellowship on men; hence her misconduct—but she adds feminine gaiety to masculine fun. Malvolio is a moral teetotaller; his gravity is that of decorum. Helena of *All's Well* readily admits lack of personal merit, but inwardly claims moral merit that requires time and opportunity to win her object; and she trusts in her motive rather than her own power. Claudio of *M. Ado* is untouched by the old men's anguish at losing their child. Craft prevails throughout *John*—scoundrelism not dreading to be, but to be proved. The contrast is Constance's disdain of all caution. After Arthur's death Falconbridge discovers his patron's baseness and adds moral to physical courage. Leontes of the *W. Tale* never commands our sympathy in his jealousy. In the reconciliation scene, Hermione's is silent action. Shylock's morality is founded on the great law of wild nature ratified by his own national code. Hotspur in *Henry IV* has the same genius as Falconbridge, but distinct individuality. We think only of the latter's athletic frame, but of the former we are constantly reminded of some peculiarity which makes us feel as though we had known him. Falstaff's ample person corresponds with his opulent imagination. It is the carnival of the intellect, and he lies from the impulse of his humour as much as the will to deceive. Yet Shakespeare has drawn him so that no one wishes to imitate him. The charge of cowardice is explained by his love of ease, and his wit glows brightest in exaggerating. Richard III only seems sincere and in earnest when about to commit a murder.

Thus does Cowden Clarke vindicate his opinion that there are small and delicate lights in Shakespeare's characters which make them exhaustless as studies. But he has also some less personal and more philosophic judgements, the best of which are these. The courtiers in *Macbeth* all suspect the same man, but dare not breathe their suspicion. This produces harmonious proportion which other dramatists lack. The feeble-minded and pliable-conscienced sink their scruples below their interests and remain about him. The Witches are not subordinate characters but prime movers, yet only when they found Macbeth's mind prepared for murder. This makes a grander moral, that he was no passive instrument. Lady Macbeth never saw them, and Banquo was untouched by them. Of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, he says, how wretched is the prince who needs such hangers-on. Iago is intellect without moral feeling, mind without soul. Unguided self-will destroys all the characters of *Lear*, even Cordelia. Unyielding exercise of will creates moral unity of action in all the leading characters, good and bad. Oswald, from the habit of servile slavish obedience, would commit any crime like a machine.

We will conclude with some instances of his uninspired manner and obvious sayings. Falstaff of the *M. Wives* was equal to Falstaff of the histories. Othello's ruling principle was aristocratic pride, and he thought himself above Brabantio in lineage. Antony might have swayed the world had he not been a sensualist and voluptuary. Prospero was by nature a selfish aristocrat, who gave himself up to study, yet would preserve his State and authority. He assumed despotic sway of his new territory. There was no love between Benedict and Beatrice, but the self-love of each was fanned to a flame by their friends' plot. Through Shylock Shakespeare preaches a homily on injustice. Bolingbroke was an oppressor with heart of ice.

## II

THOMAS KENNY<sup>1</sup> argues that Shakespeare had but a slight and unobtrusive personality, and therefore passed readily into the personalities of others. Creative imagination has a feminine element, and a large, vague yearning for love developed his genius. It led him to look into the universe for sympathy, and this showed him that all things were fleeting and shadowy, and only death certain. His poems reveal his unimposing personality, but his weakness enabled him more readily to restore its own wonderful life to the boundless universe beyond him. He wished to copy nature, and had no personal prepossession to unfold. He used individual characters as the means to disclose wider and more permanent forms of existence. His imagination raises them above their own uninspired personality. Hamlet yields to impulses the origin of which we do not know, and Iago's malignity comes from we know not where. Thus does the world's greatest imaginative genius lay bare humanity's innermost life. He cares little for the life about him, and takes stories from romance where probability can be disregarded. He creates living beings and dismisses them when they have served his purpose. Art should surpass nature, and make man sympathetically apprehend the most expressive forms in which Nature reveals her soul. Imaginative sympathy connects and harmonizes the whole unseen world of spirit. Shakespeare was cramped by fixed historical events, but would unite strange diversities of mind and matter, and set forth remote affinities. He had no passion for ideal perfection, he bestowed no anxious labour on details. He concentrated on his greatest scenes;<sup>2</sup> otherwise he was negligent and without art, and his huge imagination lacked corresponding taste. The end of the play is often ill-managed, because there he had to do with reality. He copied nature's actual forms too minutely for fastidious taste: he does not omit the commonplace failures of life. Perhaps he wants deep spirituality: and here again he follows nature. He could not transform our vague longings into living realities. His comedy is the result of a

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Genius of Sh.*, 1864.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Stoll and others.

more personal and, therefore, weaker mood. Tragedy seems less an accident and exception in the universe. His great creations are never models, but through the working of violent and irregular impulses he shows us the deepest springs of human action. He uses Lady Macbeth—her ambition and her collapse—to create an image of ideal grandeur and terror. His pattern heroes—Romeo, Ferdinand, Orlando, Florizel—are never strongly marked.

The particular instances that illustrate this general theory are as follows. The only promising thing in *Verona* is that the love is capricious, restless, and disordered—and the characters easily pass from one state to another. In the *Errors* Shakespeare creates a complicated and intricate perplexity beyond frolicsome humour. There is variety and movement in *L.L.L.*, but also indistinctness and confusion. The story of *M. Ado* is romantic and improbable, and the dialogue extravagant. In *M.N.D.* Shakespeare builds a dramatic structure with slight materials. Characters are feebly drawn and incidents mean and trivial; but he gives outward form to the mind's most shadowy and fugitive images. The incidents of the *Merchant* are complex and improbable; the cause of Shylock's malignity to Antonio is obscure. *A.Y.L.* shows that when Shakespeare displayed his purely sportive powers and personal likings, they were partly extravagant and unmeaning: e.g. Touchstone's wit. The *Wives* lacks his large and free imagination; the characters are made up of a few idiosyncrasies, like Ben Jonson's. Malvolio's punishment in *Twelfth-Night* is coarse and excessive. Viola does not command sympathy; she is not completely true either in the imaginative or natural sense. In *All's Well* Bertram's vices do not interest, and his character lessens our interest in Helena. She succeeds by an extravagant, not a delicate, stratagem. Cloten, in *Cymbeline*, is a real, unconventional, human being. Iachimo is one of Shakespeare's manly villains who sin without motive, and then easily lay aside their wickedness. Imogen is wrought out of refined sensibility rather than the highest creative imagination. Neither is the *Tempest* creatively inspired in the highest sense, because it is beyond probability and nature. Ariel's thoughts and desires are essentially, even narrowly, human. Gonzalo is as indistinct as all his class in Shakespeare.

*Henry IV* seizes on the humorous and serious aspects of life with imaginative ease and vigour. Falstaff is the genius of universal merriment; he is definite enough to be real, and wide enough to admit of the play of unrestrained humour. We never penetrate to the King's inmost feelings; neither is his personal influence over events distinct or decisive. The Prince does not abandon himself frankly to dissipation, so fails to be real, and is a less rare being than Hotspur. Falstaff's dismissal is an instance of Shakespeare's indifference to his characters. No doubt Shakespeare wrote *1 Henry VI*, if we allow for the period. It has frequent elements of true imaginative vitality, and brings men

and times before us with vigour and distinctness. Parts II and III have his own strange carelessness. It is unlikely that he began his career by amending the plays of others.

*Hamlet* is the most universally interesting and typical play. Exceptional influences agitate an exceptional temperament. A curious psychological study has been grafted on the story of a half-barbarous age.<sup>1</sup> The events are improbable and the workmanship careless. The King's insipid character hardly consists with his tremendous and remorseless career of crime. Laertes would not have consented to such hideous treachery. The only order is the manifestation of disordered energy. We see man helpless before his destiny. The agony of the individual mind grows to the dimensions of the universe. In *Macbeth* we see Shakespeare by the mere force of expression making a narrow scene grand and elevated, and raising it to the wide region of imaginative passion. . . .

This criticism has many minor blemishes, but its ultimate effect is to enlarge our conception of Shakespeare. It helps us to realize the vast abyss over which his spirit brooded—but our return voyage to earth is less prosperous. It makes passion more mysterious, but detracts from the human means which cause it to be known on earth. Man is a mere lightning-conductor—a witness to the terror of the storm and the wrath of God—rather than an organ-pipe to set moving waves and tremors of heavenly sound. Some of the writer's strictures—on the careless plots of the *Merchant* and *M. Ado*, on the characters of Prince Henry, Iachimo, Laertes, on the dismissal of Falstaff, the psychology of *Verona*—are endorsed by modern critics who react against the indiscriminate admiration of half a century ago. But we need only refer to his remarks on Shylock, Touchstone, Viola, Ariel, the King in *Hamlet* to be convinced of his faulty psychology. That he accepts the *Henry VI* plays as genuine—the strength of an impression apart from its character—proves further the danger of an all-compelling theory. He repeats the old criticism that Shakespeare lacked art and followed nature, and he has done good service in helping us to realize the huge and mysterious energy, called Nature, with which Shakespeare's mind interacted. He has two remarks—one general, one particular—that should not be forgotten; that it is the business of art to surpass nature—and that we have in *Hamlet* a curious psychological study grafted on the story of a half-barbarous age.

### III

CHARLES WORDSWORTH<sup>2</sup> maintains that Shakespeare was a diligent and devout reader of the Bible—more so than all the other best English authors united. He quotes passages to prove how accurately

<sup>1</sup> Cf. J. M. Robertson.

<sup>2</sup> *Sh.'s Knowledge and Use of the Bible*, 1864.

and reverently Shakespeare's language represents the letter and spirit of the Bible narrative; e.g. Bolingbroke on Gloster's death: '... Which blood like sacrificing Abel's cries'; Hamlet's saying, 'There is a special providence in the fall of a sparrow . . .', or such a phrase as Hamlet's 'full of bread'. Shakespeare, he says, represented the consequences of sin as vividly as the Bible itself: *Richard III*, *Macbeth*, *Othello*, *Coriolanus*. He makes clear that repentance must spring from sorrow, not fear of punishment—as with the King in *Hamlet*. He emphasizes the need of prayer—Richmond before and after Bosworth, Claudius who laments his 'words without thoughts'—and Angelo his 'empty words'. . . . He never ridicules ministers of religion, as other play-writers have done. We will omit Wordsworth's further attempts to reconcile Shakespeare's teaching in domestic and political matters with orthodox Christianity: relations between husbands and wives, parents and children (Jessica, Anne Page, Katharine)—the importance of gradations in society (*T. and C.*). No theories of Shakespeare himself by means of the dramatic speeches of his characters have yet succeeded. What he does show is that Shakespeare's mind was familiar with biblical phrases, and that he owes to Scripture some of his sublimest images. He compares, 'Leave not a rack behind' (*Tempest*), to Isaiah, 'The heavens shall vanish away like smoke'. Richard II says God is 'mustering in His clouds . . . Armies of pestilence . . .', which recalls Sennacherib. Similarly, 'Stones crying out', and, 'The stones of Rome to rise and mutiny' (*J.C.*).

#### IV

DAVID MASSON<sup>1</sup> deprecates the anti-biographical spirit that would be content with a man's works only. To do justice to books you must recognize in each one the product of a mind situated in such a manner and moved by such an aim. Not till every poem has been chased up to the moment of its organic origin, and resolved into the mood or intention, or constitutional reverie, out of which it sprang, will its meaning be grasped. He agrees with Kenny that Shakespeare had an unusually unobtrusive personality. The Sonnets, he considers, contain much of his deepest moods and musings and keenest self-confession.

Imagination does not create out of nothing, it merely recombines, and every play leaves behind a total impression. A dramatist is the Providence and Judge of his little world, and therefore reveals his moral views of things, his philosophy of life and history: e.g. mercy and mutual forgiveness run through *M. for M.* like a golden thread. Shakespeare's sympathy is always for what is good and lovely and honourable; though crime and strife exist in his world, happiness

<sup>1</sup> *Sh. Personally*, 1865 (London, Smith Elder, 1914).

predominates. Among his higher characters are examples of all the human virtues. He was not anti-democratic, but seemed to dislike overt action by the mob to redress political wrong.

The mood of his early plays is the Romeo-Proteus-Biron mood: passionate, impetuous, unstable. The leading powers are love and pleasure, but there is also much to observe and satirize. There follows the Jaques-Hamlet mood: meditative, inquisitive, intellectual, sceptic, with sense of mystery. Then the mood of 1603-9, a high and tragic world, full of tremendous moral realities, and the passions and fates and frenzies of full-grown and experienced men. The subjective mood briefly reasserts itself in *Coriolanus* (one of Shakespeare's most tremendous and self-revealing plays), and *Timon*; but the final mood is one of reconciliation. All through the plays is a latent or proclaimed sense of the phantasmagoric character, the non-reality of the world. Perhaps he inherited this from the Gothic cosmology, though his ethics within the real world were Christian.

One should not interpret Shakespeare through detached passages, for dramatic reasons, but rather by Recurrences and Fervours: i.e. phrases repeated, and things uttered with heat. Julius Caesar is the man he mentions oftenest, and his metaphors are frequently derived from the stage. Among fervours are Gaunt's apostrophe to England and Prospero's final speech. The latter is his most characteristic utterance, and it is matched by the mood of the Sonnets—the fixed or ever-recurring idea of Death, Change, Mortality, Time, the phantasmagoric character of all that is. It is Shakespeare's deepest, or *metaphysical*, mood—the last thoughts that Humanity can think about itself; and which it must always think when it imagines itself as a whole. Space-feeling is strong in Milton, Time-feeling in Shakespeare. The theme of death incessantly recurs in Shakespeare; his mind had acquired the metaphysical habit which may be called a meditation of Death. . . .

No doubt Masson has overstated his case, but in his method of trying to reach Shakespeare's self he has outstripped his predecessors. Can we honestly say that in reading the early plays, the joyous comedies, and the great tragedies we feel this world to be unreal? Even in the tragedies, does not death seem a little thing rather because life has failed? At the same time we may cast a glance forward to Professor's Bradley's remarks on the death of Cordelia, and it is not to be denied that Shakespeare had such a mood. The method of Recurrences and Fervours is a sound one, and equally sound is the habit to judge by the total impression of a play rather than the individual sayings of its characters. If the 'metaphysical' mood was not all-pervading, we are indebted to Masson for proving that Shakespeare had such a mood, and for defining it exactly.



## V

J. A. HERAUD<sup>1</sup> is one of those with a theory which ill fits its mighty subject. We will first explain his theory in outline, then select some of its notable errors, and lastly give instances where the theory has prevailed and something new comes to light about Shakespeare.

The autonomies of the moral being, he says, give the motive to human action, and in this Shakespeare found his leading ideas. He sought from the first to support his poetry with an inner meaning, to work it out from a central idea, which his story must subserve. His works are a new evangel, with himself for hero and author. Never was poet worse served by biographers who invented scandalous tales. His mission was to justify the passion of love as the motive-spring of all healthy human action, and he is the champion of marriage. He did not write to please the crowd, but pursued his upward flight regardless of popular opinion or profit, and worked for self alone. In his early plays he depended on his given materials and acquired observation. Then the ideal works unconsciously and impels him to accept his experiences as symbols of his inner life. He sees how love influences life, and this leads him to an ideal drama where the characters represent the implied conceptions and labour together in obedience to a common initiative, without even needing a story to move them. After forth-shadowing the sublime ideas suggested by history and observation, he ascended to the mere abstractions of the mind and purer intuitions of self-consciousness. We recognize in these dramas a perpetual genesis, one suggesting another, and each a growth referring to what preceded it. Their author's aim was to teach the sublime and beautiful in poetic composition. Like Plato he saw the human intelligence as the image of the divine, and the influence of love and strivings of will conflicting with nature and the social order. His poems are self-communings. . . .

It is needless to say that the mantle in which the critic drapes the image of Shakespeare is a partial disguise. No one will dispute that he was a great unconscious philosopher, but the poet and dramatist were prior to the thinker. To affirm that he equals Bacon and anticipates Kant and Hegel is to displace the balance between abstract and concrete, between thought and image, which he held exactly. The system which Heraud seeks to impose on Shakespeare's universal genius is rather his own private scheme which he wishes to make objective. As examples of its failures we give the following:

*Verona* shows one who had survived the passion of love so could sport with it. In *L. L. L.* is the genius of Protestantism—the triumph of Protestant principle over vows of celibacy. The Prince in *Henry IV* is an unconscious dissimulator; he is a benevolent genius living with

<sup>1</sup> *Sh.: His Inner Life as intimated in his Works*, 1865.

inferior natures, and will ultimately benefit them because he knows their infirmities. His speech in Act III, full of mystical meaning, is the climax. Claudio in *M. Ado* is merely reticent, but when roused runs into extremes. The aim of *A. Y. L.* is to set forth the power of patience and self-command as the cure for earth's ills. Jaques is melancholy because his wisdom is impracticable. Malvolio of *Twelfth-Night* illustrates the general argument—love without reasonable hope. In *Othello* Desdemona is romantic, but in romance is fiction, and she evades the truth. *M. for M.* illustrates Papal tyranny in Europe that would cultivate only the spirit and destroy the natural man. The Duke's marriage to Isabella unites Church and State. In *T. and C.* Shakespeare is the champion of marriage. He looked down with a superior smile on brute men who thought themselves gods and proved themselves mortal by slaying each other. *Cymbeline* is also written in honour of marriage; and in the *W. Tale* he seems to say, 'Have no fear of marriage; only the single meet with false women. Marriage makes all women honest.' In *Camillo and Paulina* Shakespeare justifies second unions between persons in advanced life rather than single state. Macbeth and Lady Macbeth love each other—so that even crime could not degrade marriage with Shakespeare. The *Tempest* is a religious allegory. Prospero attains the divine state where will and power are one. Through his warning to Ferdinand, Shakespeare disproves the calumnies of his biographers. Had he acted thus, he would not have recorded this condemnation of his own conduct. *Timon* in its argument of unstable fortune resembles *Henry VIII.* Macbeth's disposition and destiny were antagonistic, and he is Jesuitical in attempting to hasten a good end by evil means.

And now for some examples of Caesar's better parts. The theme of *Verona* is love's omnipotence and irresponsibility. *All's Well* rises into the poetic region of transcendental morals. Helena sees through the crude hardness of the undeveloped Bertram to his inner possibility. *R. and J.* suggests infinite love, exceeding the limits of that sensuous power by means of which it obtains its wishes. Richard II is partly a personality, partly a creature of circumstance. He sinks as much from the irresistible course of events as his own errors. Richard III subordinates moral to intellectual, and achieves satanic grandeur. The aim of the play is to present in one magnificent whole the results of civil war. John stands for England's policy, and appears simply as a politician—whereas Salisbury is no politician. Shakespeare wished to transcend the pettier moralities of private life. It is untrue to say that the fairies in *M.N.D.* have intellect and no morality. Titania regrets the effect of their dissensions on 'human mortals', and Oberon cares for men's interests. Jaques in *A. Y. L.* sees with transcendental eye that forest life may also be morally wrong. The argument of *Twelfth-Night* is love without reasonable hope—the Duke, Viola, even Olivia,

deceived by the page's disguise. Supported by its inner life the parts cohere. Othello is a perfect soul, but would not be dramatically interesting save for his one flaw—that he could be 'wrought'. In *Lear* we see love between parent and child in an inchoate state in a pre-conventional period. In the time of *T. and C.* convention has been fixed, but love has broken down barriers. Shakespeare did not wish to throw himself into the Homeric age, but to point the moral by raising that age to the level of his own. The idea of *J.C.* is the multitude's instinct of danger from the self-assertion of such characters as Coriolanus realized. Antony and Cleopatra thought themselves like gods, free from all law but their own wills.<sup>1</sup> This prevents the play from being immoral, as with Dryden. Coriolanus and Caesar were cut short, but Antony shows to what lengths unlimited will can lead.

## VI

A. O. KELLOGG'S<sup>2</sup> book should be compared with Bucknill's; the value of both is that they prove Shakespeare to have known intuitively facts of psychology and physiology from one to two hundred years before they were discovered by scientists. Thus he recognized madness to be a disease of the brain, not an infliction of the Devil. In turning over Kellogg's pages we rather note that his standard for Shakespeare's characters is the well-established social order of the moral world; none the less, like Bucknill, he uses his special knowledge to make us realize more fully how complex was Shakespeare's artistic faculty.

*Lear* shows the imbecility of old age, and Shakespeare seizes on the premonitory signs usually overlooked by ordinary observers. His waywardness from impending disease meets with no forbearance. The storm is made intense by psychological interest.

Hamlet is really mad, and this explains his harshness and cruelty. Shakespeare knew that melancholic madness often stimulates the intellect and injures the will and moral feelings. He speaks penetrating words to Polonius, and treats Ophelia with refined cruelty. He spares the King at prayer because he was not then moved by the impulse under which alone he can act. In his interview with the Queen he shows the levity of the insane in view of the dreadful circumstances caused by their own acts. His paroxysm in Ophelia's grave is madness beyond all doubt.<sup>3</sup> Ophelia is Shakespeare's most feminine character, yet she is strong. After her father's death she sinks into a form of mild mania. Her language is the kind daily heard in the wards of asylums. Coherence and incoherence are strangely but truthfully mixed; and

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Hudson.

<sup>2</sup> *Sh.'s Delineations of Insanity, Imbecility, and Suicide* (N.Y. 1866).

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Bucknill.

through all appears the truthfulness, gentleness, and loving-kindness of her nature.

Jaques suffers from incipient melancholia; he has not the egotism of the genuine melancholic. He lays hold on external things and converts them into life-giving intellectual aliment, not to poison. He sympathizes with all, is not self-centred, and receives the Duke's personalities well. He deals in generalities, and is the gentlest satirist.

Othello's intellect is not of the highest order; he has strong passions and affections, but his perception is weak. His reason and judgement are not diseased but clouded by the passions which Iago stirs up. He does not nurse his passion like one insane, but struggles against it. So fearful a working of contending passions would suffice to derange any mental organization; but his mind retains its integrity, as his last words show. There are certain mental constitutions which no combination of moral causes can overthrow, because the inherent germ is not present. . . .

We must set against Kellogg's remarks on Hamlet, that Shakespeare never drafted the play, but by an afterthought made the subtlest of thinkers the hero of an old tragedy of revenge; that if Hamlet is mad he is not morally responsible; and that between health and madness there is no definite line. According to Kellogg such a line does exist—as we see from his last words on Othello.

## VII

THEORIES about the Sonnets only concern us when the arguments are strengthened by aesthetic criticism, such as that of Gerald Massey,<sup>1</sup> who pleads that they should be interpreted dramatically. He assumes that, as poets then wrote sonnets for their patrons, so Shakespeare did so for Southampton who was in love with Elizabeth Vernon. Shakespeare admired not Southampton's intellect, but his fine generosity and hearty frankness of nature. He knew well there is nothing like true marriage,<sup>2</sup> and he wished to get him married. After Sonnet 27 there is no mention of sex; the spirit is too delicate for the grosser ear of man. We hear the voice of that all-absorbing, absolute, all-containing love that woman alone engenders in man's heart. The facts of Southampton's life answer perfectly to the Sonnets. They were published in 1599; yet no whisper was heard against Shakespeare, because they were not personal confessions. If his friend had really taken his mistress would he have proclaimed it? His object was to glorify his friend and win honour for him. The Sonnets are dramatic, and the speaker here is a woman addressing her lover and woman-rival. The arguments and point of view can only be applied to an innocent woman, not a guilty man. It is love and possession of the absolute kind which only woman

*Sh.'s Sonnets never before Interpreted*, 1866.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Heraud.

can claim: and here it was Elizabeth Vernon and her friend and cousin, Lady Rich. It was not true to Shakespeare's nature—his serenity, calm, sweet and large affections, ordered life, and imagination that had the deep stillness of brooding love. Southampton was imprudent, impatient, unstable, yet more amiable in his vices than some are in their virtues. These Sonnets paint his past history and render his character to the life.

In the Dark Lady Sonnets there is a feeling of youth, and the speaker is too young to be Shakespeare. In the plays Shakespeare abets no intrigues of the kind and encourages no treacheries to the marriage-bed. They were probably written for William Herbert, from pure good nature, to express his passion for Lady Rich.

The Sonnets most truly reveal Shakespeare's inner life during twelve years. They gain in beauty, gravity, fitness when we reach underlying realities. Their poetic qualities grow when we see the persons rightly related. Truth is the eternal basis of the highest beauty, and indefinitely deepens the meaning. We breathe more freely to know that he did not crucify himself for the whole world to see his shame, or make poetic capital out of his friend. He needed dramatic method when his subject was real life. His greatest characters are real and deep because of the amount of real life at the heart of them. Compare the *M.N.D.*, where Hermia is Lady Rich and Helena Elizabeth Vernon. We see how Shakespeare attained that remoteness when dealing with familiar things which can invest mere earth with a lustre in the distance as of a lighted star. Lady Rich was also the model for Cleopatra, and Essex, the puzzle of history, was afterwards called Hamlet. . . .

This dramatic theory of the Sonnets is one that cannot be proved, but Massey at least uses it to explain that Shakespeare was skilled to convey the most characteristically feminine emotions. Otherwise his point of view is somewhat akin to Heraud's: only a faultless man could write such perfect poems. The relation between the real and imaginative world is imperfectly conceived, and he says openly that the Sonnets gain in beauty when we know the underlying realities. Nowadays we maintain that a work of art must be independent to be perfect—that it forfeits perfection in so far as it needs to be supplemented by its author's biography. The critical age of Massey and Heraud failed to understand how subtly the two worlds were related. As an example of perfect, all-satisfying art we will ask their shades to consider the following lines from Sonnet 29:

Wishing me like to one more rich in hope,  
Featured like him, like him with friends possess'd,  
Desiring this man's art, and that man's scope,  
With what I most enjoy contented least.

## VIII

HENRY GILES<sup>1</sup> ascribes to Shakespeare every form of genius, including the feminine element. His creations are transcendently real, e.g. *M.N.D.* is remote from life yet answers to what we know and feel. Shakespeare's moral nature is the most vital cause of the growth of his influence. It unites times, races, religions, and is the key to the whole of human nature, and most essential to poetry. The moral nature of Shakespeare's genius has the depth and dimensions of universal humanity. It reveals every degree, difference, and mode of passion—and in it he stands alone. It is religious as well as ethical, with the twofold significance of the divine and human. Shakespeare not only knew the heart of men, but man from without. His age was a representative one, and within his real world is an ideal one.

The vital principle of art is suggestion, e.g. the world has no such Prince as Hal—and Autolycus is really a rascal. But in Shakespeare we see men and women in their innermost souls. He has not the egotist strain of Dante, Milton, Wordsworth, and never concentrates humanity into his own individuality, but gives us human beings in their genuine concrete existence. Life presented to us in the region of the ideal brings home the grandeur of humanity. We gain the temper to see it wisely; we hate without agitation of resentment, love without troubles of hope or fear, pity without anguish, praise without personal prejudice. He lifts crime into the tragic and ideal, and makes guilt, power, and the heroic reveal to us the human sublime most awfully and impressively. Thus emotion rouses intellect to life's mysteries. Shakespeare is equalled by others in intellect and imagination, but not moral reason.

As man becomes individualized with personal character we see how truly the spirit of nature worked in the genius of Shakespeare. The grief of his women melts us, but that of his men appals us. Therefore through men he brings before us the most dismal and fearful havoc of the soul. In the night of sorrow we behold the tragic grandeur of human nature. The misfortunes of Lear and Othello spring from their character, and are destiny, not retribution. Imogen instances the ideal element in his women by seeing her husband through the illusion of her own hallowed imagination. Vice is more fatal to woman than man, e.g. Cleopatra, Cressida. It kills affections in their source, and therefore the soul of womanhood. Anguish raises Constance above thrones and worlds, and stirs within her the holiest principles of life. Lady Macbeth is restored to the feeling of our kind by our sympathy with sorrow. Her devotion to her husband holds her within the circle of her sex. Shakespeare's comedy implies serious judgement in the vesture of motley. He compares the hidden workings of life with its

<sup>1</sup> *Human Life in Sh.* (Boston, 1868).

outside seemings, and his sense of incongruity embodies itself in irony.

Greek tragedy gathers round it the terrors of the supernatural and the forces of the universe; but Shakespeare finds in the man himself the living soul which gives grandeur to surrounding power, and witnesses to the infinitely divine intelligence wherein all being has its meaning. Passion discovers man's longing for the infinite, because it attributes perfection to its object, which experience falsifies—and so conflict arises between fact and idea. All comes from the innate action of the mind, and every word fits the individual, so that we follow not the course of a passion, but the moral history of a person. There is no disproportion, because due order is maintained with the scale of the massive power which moves in them equally and naturally. We hear as matters of course the supremely solemn thoughts of Lear and Hamlet, like our own household speech. The playwright so interweaves moralizing with action. In this Shakespeare seems to think aloud, and to speak most in his own personality. . . .

Perhaps Giles concentrates too exclusively on Shakespeare's moral reason, but he applies his theory excellently in some concrete instances—notably *Lady Macbeth*. His detailed criticism excels his general—although it was the fault of his time to assume that the moral nature could be segregated from the intellectual and physical. He distinguishes finely between the Greek and Shakespearian drama, and by maintaining that the individual soul is an epitome of the universe, and in the criminal's soul is something good, he moves a stage along the most likely road of discovering Shakespeare's own view of the world. That he was a gnomic poet we do not dispute—above all when we think of *Hamlet*, *Lear*, and *M. for M.*; but Giles asserts over-confidently that his moralizings express his personal thoughts. He helps to reverse the common error of Heraud, Massey, and others as to the real and imaginative worlds. His remarks on the effect of *M.N.D.*, on Prince Hal, and Autolycus lead us back by a circuit to the oft-forgotten truth that Shakespeare was first a poet and secondly a philosopher. What he says of the passions might be compared with Coleridge's epigram—that the great passions are atheists, believing in no future.

## IX

JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL'S<sup>1</sup> essay inclines to be a panegyric. After some general criticism of his subject, he takes scenes or characters where Shakespeare has been excepted to and vindicates him. He first says that the aim of art is to represent great passions ideally. Shakespeare depicted men in society without questioning the right of that society to exist. His business was with the human soul as shaped by life, not in the abstract. He was sensitive to the wonder and beauty of

<sup>1</sup> *Sh. Once More*, 1868 (*Among my Books*, Boston, 1882).

outward life and nature. All about his age favoured him: the Reformation, printing, the discovery of the New World, the growth of national feeling. The meaning of words was undulled; there was no gap between the speech of life and books—no arbitrary line between high words and low. Ben Jonson lived to see verse become conventional. Shakespeare's creative imagination is a faculty, not a quality, not fantasy or image-making power, but it fuses thought and word indissolubly. Style is the establishment of perfect mutual understanding between worker and material; it is unconscious abnegation of self, as mannerism is wilful obtrusion of self. Violence is not intensity, and Shakespeare does not always speak in an intense way, but he can be equable and grand without effort, so that we forget the high places of thought to which he has led us.<sup>1</sup> Imagination is immanent with him; his language is no mere vehicle of thought but part of it, its very flesh and blood. We receive direct pleasure as from the smell of a flower or flavour of a fruit. . . .

This has the common-sense basis of much American criticism, without the frequent American disregard of critical tradition. Lowell's mind was steeped in learning, but he looks directly at his subject. By analysing the style he makes clearer how Shakespeare realized the imaginary world. He partly recalls Carlyle's criticism—that Shakespeare, compared with Dante, gives us the outer life of Europe, the practice or body—and partly that of Knight who shows how Shakespeare's finer world interpenetrates our own.

His least satisfactory applied criticism is of the *Tempest*, where he fails to recognize the concrete nature of Shakespeare's genius which he started by according to him. He finds the play a perfect allegory, with symbolical, not typical, characters. Prospero is embodied imagination, Ariel fancy, Caliban brute understanding, Miranda abstract womanhood. The subordinate characters are types, viz. Gonzalo is average sense and honesty. He compares Shakespeare and the Greeks in accents that recall Giles. Something like destiny reigns in the four great tragedies, only it is in man, not above him. In the characters of Lear, Othello, Macbeth, Hamlet the catastrophe is as sternly foredoomed as by an oracle. A sentence on Hamlet is well worth considering, because the matter has been used against Shakespeare. Hamlet, he says, doubts all—the soul's immortality after seeing his father's spirit—and the means to make him act—the Ghost—excites his imagination and gives a fresh topic for his scepticism.<sup>2</sup> The best of his further remarks on Hamlet are as follows: The hero's irony is part of his real nature—the half-jest half-earnest of an inactive temperament undecided whether life is real or not. If really mad he would be irresponsible, and the whole play a chaos<sup>3</sup>—whereas assumed

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Giles's remarks on proportion in Sh.*

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Hartley Coleridge.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Bucknill.



madness enables him to play with life and duty. Horatio is unimaginative, a foil to Hamlet, and first becomes conscious of self and talks of suicide when his friend dies and no longer needs him. The gravedigger scene has been blamed, yet it causes all that we remember of Ophelia to react with tenfold force.

## X

AS the title of his book shows, Richard Simpson's<sup>1</sup> preoccupations were philosophical, and, as strictly such, they fail to satisfy. Shakespeare is overridden by a theory, and we are not told clearly enough what his independent mind effects. It is well known that Plato was worshipped by the scholars of the Renaissance—and Simpson rightly says that the *Symposium* was the source of the philosophy of all the great sonnet writers—and love, with Plato, was passion for the beautiful. Briefly stated, the doctrine of the *Symposium* is that love, beginning with a beautiful form, thereafter perceives the beauty of laws and institutions, and so rises to conceive the absolute beauty. Simpson tells us that the world problem of philosophy is to reconcile the contradiction of mind and matter, and that love is the all-reconciling principle. The first impression from the Sonnets is of passionate love for earthly beauty; the second, of love as much directed to beauty of mind as body; the third, that the object of Shakespeare's love begins to expand into something more universal than the individual friend—something that suggests immortality and infinity. The object is rest and peace of the intellect by marriage with truth and reality, or of the soul by marriage with objective mind. They express the progress of the soul from infinitesimal beginning to an end all but infinite. We see the three steps of love, conceived in the eyes, generalized in the imagination, concentrated in the judgement. In the final stage all the elements are united; all former evils become fuel for all-consuming love. After a time sex is not mentioned because, in a gradual elevation of love and in its transformation through successive stages, its object becomes more and more generalized, more spiritual, with less definite sex or human personality. When Shakespeare uses real events or characters, it is to display the progress of love to best advantage. The Sonnets illustrate and agree with the thoughts of the deepest writers on the subject of love. This love philosophy is a way of stating the realities of human nature.

It is needless to say that the final impression left by this book is of the theory, not Shakespeare. Yet a few definite shapes stand out of the abstract haze. In Shakespeare, he says, the lover becomes the woman, and conquers by submission and purity. A feminine element exists in perfect man, and there is something of this in exalted friendship. The

<sup>1</sup> *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Sh.'s Sonnets*, 1868.

first series of Sonnets shows that in artistic friendships Shakespeare had cultivated this feminine element, and it explains his unique power to draw women in the plays. It was also peculiar to Shakespeare, and, unlike Petrarch, that in the absence of the beloved he makes all beautiful things in nature mere types and memorials of his beauty. . . . However, the book interests rather as expounding the philosophy of the Renaissance sonneteers than as a criticism of Shakespeare—and in dismissing it we are reminded of a recent remark about Sainte-Beuve—that he might have placed a warning on the confines of literature—‘Philosophers will be prosecuted!’

## XI

COWDEN CLARKE salutes Shakespeare as our great moral teacher, greatest of ethical and imaginative writers—the key to his moral rule being that breach of custom is breach of all—illustrating the principle to return unkindness with gentle deeds, and believing that goodness will prevail. Wordsworth insists that his works were saturated with divine wisdom that can only have come from the Bible; that neither Aristotle nor Bishop Butler taught more accurately the formation of moral habits; and that he stressed the need to return good for evil. In words that recall Birch and Watkiss Lloyd, he says that suicide is not forbidden in Scripture, and the ‘canon’ must be one of natural religion. Masson speaks of his almost religious moral elevation, and his Christian heart. Heraud says that his theology was divided between the Bible and the philosophy of his own age. He makes the same remark on suicide as Wordsworth, and thinks that Shakespeare anticipated the rational opinions of the mid-nineteenth century. To Massey Shakespeare’s moral supremacy was as absolute as his mental, and he was a practical Christian if not a ‘professing’ one. To Giles his moral element was religious as well as ethical, he stands alone in the moral element, and, if not formally religious, is habitually concerned with religious ideas. For Lowell, though he has no direct moral, moral reality underlies the mirage of his vision. On the other hand, Kenny says that he had no fixed and abiding religious belief, and he is no very earnest moralist in his plays.

Cowden Clarke says that his was the profoundest of all sciences—the philosophy of human actions; Massey, that he was greatest in practical thought—the wisdom that belongs to human experience; Giles, that he taught a life-philosophy, and contained in himself an epitome of all interior philosophies. In the words of Kellogg, he had knowledge beyond his age; and to Heraud, he surpassed Bacon as philosopher and anticipates Kant and Hegel.

About his characters we compare the following: from Cowden Clarke, that his skill in contrasting characters is surpassed by his skill in contrasting them with themselves (e.g. Falconbridge); from Kellogg,

that they seem not creatures of imagination but real beings; from Massey, that he gives the spirit of a character, not its physical face.

It is impossible, says, Lowell, that he who meditates profoundly on every other topic of human concern should have ignored the principles of his art. His prodigious contrivance has left no trace of labour to the eyes of Cowden Clarke—and he did nothing without anxious premeditation. To Massey, as creative artist, he was the Creator's nearest earthly representative.

He was the champion of women to Cowden Clarke; but to Kenny his women were hardly among the strongest manifestations of his genius; though he admits to them the supreme charm of delicate reserve. Simpson says that he had no chivalrous love of woman: unlike those English poets who would exalt the wife into the mistress of chivalry.

We recall Reed's saying that he revered the beauty and holiness of childhood, and compare Cowden Clarke's, that he was at the heart of childhood nature, and his children often talk beyond their years yet remain childlike. Reed also observed that Shakespeare had few instances of male friendship. As a corrective we now get Massey describing his beautiful delineations of loving friendship between men, and the sacred sweetness in his manly friendship. . . .

As the years go on we see a steady increase of Shakespeare-worship. The present critics concentrate upon his moral and religious nature, and we would utter a warning against 'imperfect sympathies'. Because they love Shakespeare's works, and because his characters utter sublime moral truths, they assume that he was the best of men and most practical of Christians. Except Lowell, they have only partially immersed themselves in Shakesperae's mind, and have therefore come forth only partially transformed. They make truer and more definite remarks about his character-drawing and artistic power.

## Chapter XV

### GERMANY 1847-1869

#### I. ULRICI. II. GERVINUS. III. CONCLUSION.

##### I

THE key-note of Hermann Ulrici's great work<sup>1</sup> is that Shakespeare's view of life is as deeply ethical as it is highly poetic. What he will chiefly consider is unity, the condition of all harmony. This inner unity is the *idea*, not of the artist, but of his work.

All art in its origin is connected with religion, and the drama, beginning with Mystery Plays, was only gradually secularized. The English plays, with their strong feeling for action, were more dramatic than the French with their long speeches and the German with their lyric effusions. The Moralities, that dramatized the whole sphere of morals in all its relations to the daily realities of life, severed the link with the Mysteries. John Heywood struck a new chord by discarding the allegorical, religious, and moral, and introducing the individual and personal. The aim of later writers was to combine idealism and reality. Comedy, which could draw directly from life, got the start of tragedy which owed more to the ancients. Sackville and Norton did the immortal service to dramatic poetry of introducing blank verse, while Lyly created dramatic prose.

The poets aimed to attract and charm the popular mind, and only thus could a Shakespeare arise. It was difficult to work artistically on such huge material, and thus there remained an epic element. Incidents merely succeeded; actions happened, and did not spring from character. Coarse passions prevailed in tragedy, and low buffoonery in comedy; but poets had grasped the essential—*action*. They seized the substance and disregarded the form. The unconscious spirit of romantic poetry is freedom and personality as against necessity—no sensuous unity but ideal unity of action—unity of the idea, of the spirit of the age, of the ideal succession and consequence of things—of spiritual space, spiritual relations—ideal coexistence of things. Ancient poetry treated ideal life, which excluded the comic. To ennoble subjects from history and the living present, to connect them with the ideal by the depth and general truth of the leading ideas, and so justify tragi-comedy, required as great a mind as Shakespeare's. But those on whose foundations Shakespeare built were the learned poets who added classicism to the popular drama—who raised the theatre into one for the educated classes without making it less popular.

Shakespeare owed something to Kyd and Lodge, and especially Peele. With Marlowe tragedy is the annihilating conflict of the

<sup>1</sup> *Sh.'s Dramatic Art*, 1847, 1868-9 (London, G. Bell, 1876).

primary elements of human nature, blind struggle between the most vehement emotions and passions. His heroes are utterly ignorant of the ideas of right and wrong, but are overruled by blind desires. The lyric predominates; the influence of the outer world on character is neglected. And yet the ground was being prepared for Shakespeare. Greater depth must be given to ideal subject-matter, and more perfect development of poetic form. It could only be done by making prominent the ethical elements of human nature. Shakespeare at first followed Greene and Marlowe, but he could only learn the technical part from his predecessors. Unlike the German, French, and Spanish drama the English excelled in action, and thus came nearest to the dramatic ideal.

The times in which Shakespeare lived favoured the development of poetry; luxury, freedom of manners, youthful vigour invested life with a halo. Also Shakespeare stood on the boundary of two great periods. In the Middle Ages, which were just past, everything had acquired a definite and inviolable shape—and mind and life appeared objectively, under fixed forms. Now the popular mind was reacting against narrow formalism and intellectual oppression, and claiming self-determination and independent knowledge. Shakespeare was close upon a future where the subjectivity of the mind began to reign. He himself was a Christian in the truest inner sense, trusting to the grace of God, not justification by works and the letter of the law. Strict, pure, and impartial morality informs his poems; his equivocal jokes were due to custom. He lived a truly poetical life, devoted to free creation and the development of his art. He was neither more nor less than poet, and this was the foundation of his greatness. He desired only to express himself, and also the infinite majesty and the baseness of human nature. He must have had vehement desires and passions, and experienced all that he describes with such vivid truth; it is therefore marvellous that the moral force kept its power over him. No poet ever more loved friendship (Sonnets), and his love of music relates him to the German mind. He was susceptible to love, but it is unproved that he lived a dissolute life. No doubt with the 'dark lady' he refers to actual circumstances, but he describes the magic power of sensual beauty, the seductive, *poetical* charm of evil. Evil had seduced but not enslaved him: he had fought but conquered. As to his knowledge, he probably knew Latin fairly well, and also French and Italian; and he may have intended his anachronisms to intimate that the root of his poems was in fancy. He was familiar with the Bible, and knew some philosophy, but it was life in London that developed his poetic genius. The rich diversified life of the metropolis gave him opportunities for studying the world and mankind. Through his friendship with Southampton and others he obtained insight into the hidden springs of history and politics. Only the *general* spirit of the age influenced him; no special,

one-sided tendencies of sixteenth-century England. He omits the political differences of his day, but is preoccupied with the general idea of the State in its moral significance.

The task before Shakespeare was to blend the romantic-fantastic-idealistic art of the Middle Ages with the modern realistic, historical spirit. Greene and Marlowe and their school held to the traditional form, Ben Jonson chose the modern only. The defect of the latter and his followers was that they believed in an external unity of action. In English drama characters are so strongly individualized that unity of action cannot embrace the variety of careers. Drama degenerates into a dramatized anecdote, or represents historically a single incident. The problem was to give English drama its suitable artistic form, by unifying variety of characters and single deeds, and adding to it an ethical character. The Greene-Marlowe School enclosed multiplicity in a general poetic mood, coloured by a definite tendency, but too wide and uncertain. The Ben Jonson School understood unity as external—that cannot give general significance to individual characters, actions, and destinies.

Shakespeare does not describe mere human actions or portray passion physiologically, but gives to the drama an ethical relation. In drawing character he represents the universal spirit of all times defined by the special. The drama is the poetical representation of universal history, and dramatic poetry is that of the present. It depicts actions themselves, the events which arise objectively out of the conditions of the mind, with the co-operation of the outer world. The truly historical is that which perceptibly influences the general formation of human affairs. Shakespeare lets nothing stand alone, but makes every speech and act an organic member of the one action. Speech with him is a mental act that belongs to the individual speaker and to the action. Feelings, thoughts, and reflections do not appear in naked purity, but are coloured and formed by the energy of will and deed. Language, supported and animated by the idea, becomes idealized.

That Shakespeare could describe states of mind which he had not experienced was due to his deep poetical insight. The poet with his creative imagination has the true idea of man in view—the spirit of humanity in its original nature and historical development. This primary personality was more complete with Shakespeare than other poets, less stamped by century and nation. He displays the universal in his hero, and uses a personal form to individualize it. He shapes Othello and Macbeth from the same element, but in revealing a man's inmost nature he reveals a general and eternal idea of human nature. The drama must show every figure in the light of a general poetico-historical view of life, the expression of some general feature of time and nation, above all from the side of energy of mind, of strength of character and will. It is an equal mistake to give small

details and distinct forms, but Shakespeare has hit the right medium. All his characters live, and are rightly related to each other; each is delineated in relation to the whole.

He was no irregular genius; mind becomes free by dominion over itself, and thence over the outer life. No dominion is possible without order, and therefore morality; and Shakespeare's moral greatness promoted his genius. According to Plato, a poet creates not with definite intention, but from unconscious inward necessity. The creating mind does not reflect on its work, so may be unable to give an account of it on completion. The drama is a living organism and needs an organic centre. By moving round the centre each character receives its definite place, and the action advances. How did Shakespeare conceive of the inner centre? What is the bond that knits the many into one?

His object was to exhibit the nature of virtue and vice, the spirit of the times, the character of the age. He must therefore have a definite conception of human life, and resolve it into its elements—so that every drama should be founded on a view of life conceived from a certain standpoint, and so circumscribed that the whole representation is based upon it, the characters formed in accordance with it, and the action determined by it; in short, that it becomes the central point. The idea must not obtrude itself or the drama would become subjective; like atmosphere it is invisible. As idea is the soul, invention is the body of the drama, that gives shape to relations between the characters of persons and the outer world. Shakespeare's characters are said to be too independent of circumstances, but he understood that a mere copy of reality does not correspond with the poetical instincts of human nature. Strength is poetical, not weakness, freedom, not dependence. Tragedy should show action determined by characters beyond ordinary experience. Shakespeare had an aristocratic conception of the world, and derived events from the characters and free resolves of princes and leaders. In his comedies the outer world has more influence, in his tragedies, character. But fact and outward position of things meet in the centre of the whole and influence the character and inner life of the persons. Mutual interaction of different groups reveals Shakespeare's great inventive power.

His view of life is Christian, because only thus does free will have its significance. The destiny of ancient drama excluded full working out of individuals. In the Christian view there is no overruling destiny, but there is a limit reserved by God. The destinies of dramatic persons are derived from their own characters and actions, but also from the state of historical life and the divine government of the world. In ancient drama there is outward solution to want of agreement; but, as the Christian God wills reconciliation of contrasts, want of agreement exists only in the nature of individuals. Solution comes only by co-operation of abundant forms and characters; and thus the English

drama developed—Mysteries (divine), Moralities (moral forces), Interludes (individuals). Shakespeare organically united the three.

Shakespeare conceived of tragedy as the suffering and final ruin of what is great in man through weakness. If man acts against his own nature he conflicts with inner moral necessity, externally in the form of destiny. The special opposes the order of the whole, or desires what is transient. In comedy the ridiculous is founded on a contradiction, dependent on the character and situation of the individual. All human existence falls under the comic view, where all becomes trifling, and the more it appears so the more it arouses the free immortal mind of man, the feeling that he is superior to the world of appearances. In tragedy suffering and death purifies man from one-sided passion and gives him true freedom. In comedy not only caprice and chance rule life, but also moral necessity. This moral power, by the hidden counter-play, baffles men's perverse resolves and actions, and turns them into their opposites. The kind of comedy Shakespeare links to tragedy is called humour. Humour rests on the realism of a warm heart full of feeling for the smallest human affairs.

The true standpoint for the criticism of a work of art lies within the work itself; one must recognize the internal design and harmony of its organism, the unity of the body and spirit which pervades its formation. The essential business is to point out the idea upon which the whole work is based. Shakespeare places an idea in the centre of each work; whereas the works of other poets are variations of one theme. Each of his poems is a world in itself, and every critic will think that he has found the centre in a different place.

Romeo and Juliet make the right of their love the law of the world, and forget the sanctity of moral order, so their love is a rebellion against moral necessity. The contrast is the hate of the parents which equally transgresses the moral law, and takes its revenge on the children, but reacts on the parents themselves. There is a destructive element in hate and love, for both are one. The key is the tragic conflict of rights and duties. The internal necessity that makes Romeo attend the Capulet feast points to a dark but certain connexion between inner and outer world. The Nurse's love of match-making must have influenced Juliet's character—and so the characters correspond with internal necessity. Paris dies because of his dull and heartless conception of love. Tybalt, too savage to feel tender emotions, is at war with the ethical power of love. The fundamental idea is the young man's view of life reflected within the tragic conception of the world. Existence is identified with the romantic love peculiar to modern Europe, that risks all for one individual.

The basis of Othello's existence is honour, but he also desires fame with a somewhat selfish passion. He is no common negro, as Schlegel and others have said, but his African origin is stressed to exhibit his



moral greatness in its most glorious light. To attain such a position he must first have overcome his violent temperament; and this makes his fall more tragic. His life was founded on love and honour, and in Desdemona he saw his own inmost self. In believing her lost he loses himself, her infidelity makes him untrue to himself. It is not relapse into his brutal nature (Schlegel), but destruction of his noble nature. That Desdemona marries him against her father is the foundation of the tragic pathos. It transgresses against the inviolable right of the family, and therefore against the protecting bond of morality. The tragedy is one of intrigue rather than character, and since intrigue has the stamp of accident and caprice, it detracts from the grandeur of tragedy. Here the true nature of marriage forms the centre of the view of life. The love of Othello and Desdemona is of the purest kind, rooted deeply in the union of two equally noble hearts, yet even this fundamental pillar may break down when torn asunder from the organic connexion of the whole moral order of the universe. Othello's was an ideal marriage, and the only shock that imported was to the internal bond, to its love. Contrast with this perfect marriage the ill-assorted one of Iago and Emilia. Their ruin is the result of this bad marriage; they have abused the sacred institution, which for them had no true love or moral foundation. Brabantio's fate is due to his erroneous opinions on marriage. The cause of Cassio's suffering is his relation to Bianca; while her contempt for marriage prevents union with Cassio. One must judge moral actions by the standard of the inmost centre of the mind, not the outer deed; and the true poet shows us this centre. Othello's suicide expresses boundless contrition; and ideal justice judges according to greatness of repentance, not of crime. Wickedness cannot rob a great character of its inner nobility, or power of mind which rises anew out of repentance.

The centre of all human relations in *Lear* is parental love and filial reverence. Lear places paternal and filial love in contradiction, because his demand is not addressed to the child's filial obedience but to its free love, and thus opposes it. Love lies in freedom; the outward deed is of no consequence. Lear's love is not pure and unconditional, for it is conferred conditionally only, that is, on condition of love in return and its outward testimony. The effect of this love on the family is to produce egotism and hypocrisy, or to drive true love back to its inmost self. Unlike Lear Gloucester broke the tie by an outward act. Edmund must be satisfied with mere sentiments, with love that contradicts its actions; he is his father's favourite yet inherits nothing. Edgar is outwardly preferred but inwardly set aside. When the power of evil seems to triumph the turning-point comes. But a foreign power from without cannot check internal disorders and restore severed ties of family and State.<sup>1</sup> The new order must grow from within, and thus

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Rötcher and Gervinus.

Cordelia fails. To some extent she is to blame for the whole catastrophe, and so she is entangled in the tragic fate. The Fool brings comedy and tragedy closer together than elsewhere in Shakespeare. He attains the object of tragic art—elevation of mind over suffering. He dies when Lear becomes insane and his occupation is gone; his character and fate are thus most closely interwoven with the fundamental theme of the whole play—the tragic power and significance of love. Lear's madness is poetically justified, for the family bond is the most inviolable condition of mental and moral culture, and if it be torn asunder and the foundation of human existence destroyed, the destruction must be exhibited both internally and externally. This madness, therefore, is the breaking up of the natural relation between the inner world of the mind and the outer visible world. The more Lear's family relations influence the state of the country the more appears the significance of the family bond. It shows how the state of countries and fate of nations depends on the morality or immorality of family life. The external composition is less sharp and regular than *Othello*, but extreme skill is shown in spinning out the threads of a rich and complicate action. The internal composition is clear and perfect, and shows how the domestic circle becomes a succession of misfortunes and miseries, if its foundation, purity of heart and free unconditional love, is undermined by a tragic contradiction in its inner nature, as with Lear, or by frivolity and weakness of character as with Gloucester. It is prominent in the secondary parts—France's true love—Burgundy's false courtship—Kent's true friendship, a part of family life.

In *Macbeth* deliberate will takes the place of the passions, and to simpler relations succeeds the more complicate one of the State, the foundation of which is justice and morality of external works. The Witches throw light on the tragic foundation of drama—that man's will is relatively, not absolutely, free. They represent the apparent favour of circumstances that promise the evil-doer safety and enjoyment. There is a tragic contradiction and germ of ruin in Macbeth's greatness, for to such greatness belongs the kingly power which he has and Duncan has not. He strives for what is highest and greatest from an internal sympathy for all that is great, but he also wishes to raise himself. Lady Macbeth is ambitious, and loves her husband only as a worthy partner of her strivings, with no true communion of souls. They represent the power of will and energy, and their sphere is the State, so there must be relation between the two. The inner discord in Macbeth's character converts the victorious hero into a contemptible tyrant, and a similar contradiction in the organism of the State changes it into wild disorder and lawlessness. Macbeth would not have acquired the throne had the nobles done their duty. They lack moral energy and therefore poetical activity. Collapse follows the destruction of the foundation of State life, and true restoration is only effected by the

positive good here represented by Siward. Duncan did not reign as a true king, the flight of his sons was unmanly, Banquo self-complacently thought of the future, Macduff only considered himself. Thus an internal necessity runs through the secondary parts. The fate of the innocent is thus justified, and they atone for their errors by developing strength of will. The fault is that the fundamental motive is not fully carried out in the personal character, life, and fate of the hero, but in part merely in his outward surroundings.

Against Goethe and Schlegel, we may say that Hamlet is audacious and foolhardy. He follows the Ghost despite his friends, he fights with the pirates; only he disapproves blind actions that spring from violent mental emotion. He determines that thought must always guide his will, and is therefore easily carried away to far-reaching considerations. He has power and desire to work to attain something great, in accordance with his own thoughts, in the independent creative activity above practical life. He therefore revolts against an act demanded only by external circumstances. He cannot turn an external action into one that is internal, free, and moral. The fruitless struggle so disturbs him that he stands on the borders between disease and health. The play is founded on the higher moral doctrines of Christianity: a heavenly spirit would not wander on earth to tell a son to avenge his death. The tragedy is one of thought—thought in its relation to action, in its freedom and independent creative power, which makes the outer world the expression of its substance. Hamlet would maintain the mastery of thought over will, over the course and formation of human life, but his plan is frustrated. Man cannot thus exalt his own thought, pleasure, will; it must be the substance of the divine order of the universe, the thought and will of the moral necessity according to which he acts by making it voluntarily his own. Hamlet ignores circumstances; he lets the feeling of aversion from his inmost nature assert itself, and he evades his task. The root of this internal contradiction is want of self-control and knowledge of self. When he acts it is on impulse, not in accordance with his own thought. The internal necessity is reflected in every turn of the action and in all the characters. The Ghost furnishes the strongest motive for Hamlet's actions, and so heightens the conflict between circumstances and character. The grave-digger scene shows how the inquisitive mind cannot even save itself from the worms.

The comedies all represent the dependence of human life and destiny on external circumstances. *Twelfth-Night* shows that man himself can be fantastic by yielding completely to his whims, or letting himself be led by chance. Here external life offers nothing strange, but the characters are all fantastic, and therefore inner life in connexion with outer offers wonderful phenomena. The title gives the hint to the intention—that life itself is a *Twelfth Night*—a merry,

fantastic bean-festival. The second title means that men all like to see the same thing represented—a chequered and varied life. The title also gives the clue to *A.Y.L.*, where all do as they please and abandon themselves to their whims, and the forest is a fitting scene for the realization of such a life. A pendant to *A.Y.L.* is the *Errors*—an amusing satire on man's power of observation and recognition, where life is conceived as a great and many-jointed mistake. All becomes confusion from a freak of nature that destroys difference of outward form. That Antipholus should lose sight of the aim and object of his journey agrees perfectly with the meaning of the play. Exaggeration gives the subject its deeper significance, and its central point that unifies the confused variety of persons, scenes, relations, incidents. It is a picture of life in the mirror of an unbridled fancy, for only in the mirror of fancy could life so depend on external form and sensuous observation. Human knowledge is not only sensuous, and one-sidedness here contains its own corrective 'error', and at last destroys itself. In the *W. Tale* also there is the full sway of accident and caprice over events. From a certain point of view life appears a strange, cheerful, yet eerie winter's tale. Through the mysterious, enveloping veil of chance we get a glimmer of a better future. Life is mysterious and governed by an unknown power, and man's only safeguard is to keep the moral law and control his passions. Here it is by mere chance that all comes right.

Shakespeare so blends the wonderful with the real that they cannot be explained apart. Unlike a fairy-tale the wonderful appears as a wonder, and his standpoint is the ideal boundary where the two lands confront each other, but the centre of gravity is on the side of reality. The internal point of unity of the *Tempest* is the intentional contrast of heterogeneous elements—dignity and degradation, purity and coarse sensuality, magic and reality. The title helps us, for when such contradictory elements meet they produce violent agitation. Even Ariel is internally excited because of his servitude. In this internal ferment, these secret throes of birth, the inmost depths of life struggle to come forth in a new form. In times of ferment and periods of transition, love of the marvellous and superstition appear side by side with the ordinary business of life. Shakespeare therefore represents life as agitated by a tempest—its own sap and forces. Except Prospero, the characters less bear their own existences than are driven on by the tempest. The centre of the action is the struggle between good and evil, and Prospero, the genius of humanity, who guides history, personifies good. The doings of the others come to nothing; only his are fulfilled, and right prevails in the struggle. The mental derangement of Antonio, Alonso, Sebastian indicates the highest pitch of general disturbance, and therefore the turning-point and transition to final pacification. All the characters lose and recover not only their outward fortune, but their own selves.

*M.N.D.* makes the principal spheres of life mutually parody one another in mirthful irony. The theme is the illusion into which men are thrown by love: even Egeus blindly prefers Demetrius. The action shows the serious side of love only so as to parody it by representing love as an illusion: in fine, the action parodies itself. Love appears no inward fascination, but subject to outward magic interference. As a dream cannot maintain itself, so all at last are brought to order. In *All's Well* we see how freedom is one of the main features of love. Helena must atone for depriving Bertram of the free choice which she exercises. Bertram falls from freedom to caprice because he prides himself in his freedom, and becomes deceiver and seducer. Love in *M. Ado* brings forward the contrast between life's essential worth and nature and its estimation and aspect in the eyes of special individuals. Dogberry discovers the *nothing* which is the cause of the *much ado*; the contrast is individualized in his contradictory doings and resolves. Benedict and Beatrice are not what they seem to be or think they are. The *Shrew's* fundamental motive is Katharina's wrong education, and her father's weakness in not ruling his household. The main idea is that only that which is natural endures.

It is hard to find the internal unity of the *Merchant*—the link between the unhappy lawsuit and the gay courtship. The solution is that a law turns to its opposite and becomes a wrong when carried to extreme. Justice is double-edged, and Portia should not be blamed had she broken her vow and given hints to Bassanio. Even the rings prove 'summum jus summa injuria'. Right and wrong are no longer distinct but pass over directly one into the other. One-sided law and justice neutralize each other, because their validity should rest on the higher principle of morality. As no one can do his duty absolutely, so no one has absolute justice on his side. Mercy must accompany justice, and only when combined with love—the foundation of morality—is justice to be fully considered. Life, therefore, is not based upon what is right, but upon love and mercy. The condition of the world requires morality to be defined and degraded into compulsory law. This sanctioned wrong protects and even excuses Shylock, produces hate in the noble Antonio, and fetters Portia's will. The basis of all is the contrast between the formal and the real.

In the perverted comic world of the *Wives* all the characters must share in Falstaff's follies—to produce play of humour and caprice of senseless plans and intentions. Falstaff's friends and enemies show less weakness and perversity, but also less mind and wit than himself. All meet with the same fate, and his less clever opponents outwit him because he is untrue to himself in appearing as a lover. Life is represented from the side where it appears the consequence of weakness and folly, but owing to the power of ridicule and jest it protects itself and makes all right. *T. and C.*, Shakespeare's only other satirical drama,

shows that what is great in man, even though surrounded by the halo of plastic ideality and a legendary past, may appear trifling when seen from the point of true moral ideality. The intention of *Cymbeline* is to exhibit the futility of self-made destiny. Only love, fidelity, purity reach the goal safely in spite of dangers. Imogen is the mirror of genuine womanliness, and also the mirror that most clearly reflects the fundamental idea of the drama. She has no plans, but follows the inclination of her pure heart, and alone attains pure happiness.

The object of historical drama is to represent artistically the historical idea that pervades a circle of facts as their hidden vital principle. It is poetical as well as ethical—a principle of the developing ideality of the human mind and life—a stage in the process in which human existence evolves its real character. The historical idea, in becoming the formative principle of the drama, acquires the artistic form—that of beauty which alone makes of the whole a work of art. But history needs a different method that extends beyond individual interests. The relations and conditions of nations survive the personal influence of individuals. But the latter acquires higher significance: an act reaches beyond the life of its originator. The individual becomes an organic part of the whole human race, and his destruction no longer exercises its full force, because the whole is indestructible. Historical drama shows nations and even humanity developing through tragic pathos and comic paralysis into a higher and more ideal form of life. Therefore general foundations, relations and institutions, develop progressively towards the form of beauty because it is that of morality. Thus the historical drama acquires a greater and more significant beauty than comedy or tragedy. A nation's customs and institutions, and its international relations, possess an ideal form as their life-giving principle, and this when given shape is the highest form of beauty. The historical poet, with prophetic spirit, must find out this ideal and its form.

Coriolanus fails because he forgets the man in the citizen and aristocrat. Because he is one-sided and places man below the citizen, the general principle of humanity avenges itself on him, and the simplest human relations work his ruin. Shakespeare exaggerated plebeian weakness because the play's central point is the contrast between the political and natural in man. The interest of *J.C.* is divided because history does not trouble itself with persons. The deaths of Caesar, Brutus, and Cassius, and the victory of Antony, reflect the same thought—that no man can guide history to his will. Caesar desired the crown, Brutus and Cassius desired outward freedom, but all experimented with history. Antony and his friends conquered because they followed the course of history. History may be externally formed by individual men, yet it controls and marches over the heads of the greatest of them.

The condition of the medieval state is the general ground on which the modern historical dramas move. In *John* we see, reflected in the King himself, the struggle between Church and State—between his better self and his tendency to arbitrary proceedings. The result of his divided self is inconsistency and want of character. The Church is anxious only for outward splendour and authority; therefore the people and barons conquer because they are soundest. Falconbridge saves England because he alone has restoring moral power. The moral of the story of Constance and Arthur is that history disavows passion and want of self-control—women's hereditary failings—and that women should not interfere with history, which demands the action for which they are unfitted.

Richard II forfeits the only rights valued by history—those founded on morality. The play's central thought is the historical significance of royalty as conceived by the spirit of the Middle Ages. Because the whole nation depends on the royal office the king should be more fully conscious of the divine grace. Shakespeare shows that because royalty exists by the grace of God, its basis is the same as that of the State—organized law and morality. It contradicts itself when it opposes the spirit and will of the nation. Henry IV's inward title to the throne was not complete; his morality was unrelated to the ideal substance of the moral law. As he had only subordinate virtues and practical cleverness, he cannot remain in undisturbed possession of the crown. His reign turns on outward establishment of usurped kingship. Absorbed in empty externals and formalities, he is the chief of stage heroes. By means of civil war we see the nature of the feudal State, the main strength of which rests not on the power of the king, but on the accidental relations between himself and his vassals. The comic scenes show up this unreality, and Falstaff is the personified parody on corrupt chivalry and vassalry. The striving for outward power is no less immoral and material than Falstaff's low theory of happiness. In *John*, Church and State promote historical development—in *Richard II*, royal dignity—*Henry IV*, vassalry—in *Henry V*, the people. The civil war of *Henry VI* is conceived as a corrective antidote for the restoration of the unsoundness of the whole. The theme of the trilogy is that civil war results from the disturbance of the course of history. In the first part the good are cast out, in the second, chaos interferes, and in the third, no one dares interfere. The action of *Richard III* is slow and uniform because tyranny means uniformity and therefore decay. Thus the artistic defect makes the meaning stand out clearer. But tyranny cannot maintain itself, and the process of self-destruction further advances the action. It expresses the highest stage of disorganization, since State and people have become helpless. But its historical and poetical significance is that it prepares a new era by removing the organic disturbance of history. The apparition scene

gives the ideal view of history—its inner connexion with the higher ethical guidance of events.

Shakespeare is pre-eminently himself as a poet of history. His style in his historical plays is most strikingly clear and individual, and the plays reveal the spirit of modern poetry in its characteristic form. Instead of merely breathing the breath of poetry into historical material, he regarded it as something which itself already contained poetry. . . .

We seem to see all Germany in Ulrici's mind—its mighty organization, its imperfect humanization. Between 1871 and 1914 Germany organized world-conquest, and failed because the human material, which is the basis of all organization, was inadequate. Even so, the basis of criticism is emotion, and the emotion which Ulrici seeks to organize into philosophy is not pure. In the Great War the British soldiers sang the songs they pleased, the Germans those they were ordered to sing. In the present treatise we repudiate the impressions which Ulrici orders us to feel.

Shakespeare's philosophy depends upon his poetry; his thought gains because it is rhythmically expressed. Hume's argument against miracles would lose nothing if conveyed to us at second-hand, but the thought of Shakespeare's gnomic passages is not to be separated from the words. Ulrici, at his worst, disconnects Shakespeare from his poetry, as in *Othello* where he tells us that the true nature of marriage forms the centre of the view of life. We will not absolutely deny that he feels the divine heat of Shakespeare's inspiration, but it encounters in his mind a certain non-conducting substance—preconceived ideas of what poetry should be—and the result is formal exposition of man-made doctrines. The reader of criticism should feel an interchanging power between poet and critic. Thus we read in Myers that Virgil sums up in lines like bars of gold the hero-roll of the Eternal City; in Arnold, that the emotion expressed by Marcus Aurelius is less than joy and more than resignation: in Mr. Mackail, that Sappho's nightingale-note is sometimes tremulous, as if it floated on an ebb of passion, like the voice of one who has sought and not found. The effect of all these phrases is to send us back more enraptured to those who inspired them; but Ulrici, even if we grant that he has visited the higher regions, sets up no counter-ladder to regain the poetic heaven. He remains on earth, and tries to adapt his new knowledge—the true nature of which he has forgotten—to his former experience of life.

Besides *Othello*, he is at his worst in *Hamlet*, which he thinks is founded on the higher moral doctrines of Christianity—in such a passage as where he says that even Egeus blindly prefers Demetrius (*M.N.D.*)—in *Cymbeline*, which seems to him to prove the futility of self-made destiny—in all that he says about Constance and Arthur. But it would be unfair to deny that there are some good things to be found in his pages—as needs must be when a vigorous and learned



mind walks in Shakespearian ways. His criticism of *R. and J.* is on the border-line, and also his saying that Macbeth would not have acquired the throne had the nobles done their duty. But he says well that Macbeth has the kingly power which Duncan has not; it recalls Carlyle's phrase that Frederick the Great and Chatham were two radiant kings. Equally penetrating is his remark that in *M.N.D.* and the *Tempest*, unlike fairy-tales, the wonderful appears as a wonder. It is due to the disabling effect of a ready-made theory that these remarks are occasional rather than integral. And yet this censure applies to the comedies and tragedies rather than the histories. He says that Caesar, Brutus, and Cassius alike experimented with history—and of Richard II, that the whole nation depends on the royal office—and many more like good things. He is at his best in treating historical matters, because historical man is naturally associated with customs and traditions and offices and ranks and grades that can easily be re-theorized. The preconceived idea, therefore, grows lighter, and its bearer can turn about and meet the breezes from beyond. He also defines with skill the poet's business with history.

It remains to dispute the theory that each play is informed by a main idea; and here again Ulrici's centre is earth rather than heaven, and he reminds us of the socialists who claim Christianity as their ally. The Founder of Christianity bade the young man sell all he had and give to the poor less for their sake than his own. The poor would gain less by acquiring his property than his own soul would be stimulated by renouncing it. Thus Ulrici argues backward from the external world instead of outward from the creating soul. The subject of poetry is the mind's inner history, and the poet uses human institutions as facets or prisms.

## II

G. G. GERVINUS<sup>1</sup> aims to do for all the plays what Goethe did for *Hamlet*—to show how Shakespeare out of one single idea laboured for moral unity—and ultimately to reach his creative spirit. In following the course of Shakespeare's early life and noting the things that influenced him, he remarks that the central point of the *Mysteries* and *Moralities*, out of which the drama developed, was the struggle between good and evil. The *Mysteries* show that a deep spiritual purport may be deposited in the drama, and the *Moralities* gave it an ethical tendency. The drama's vocation was to ennoble morals, because its subject was action, and action may not be conceived without ethical conditions. Later on, by means of court-festivities, the drama emerged from allegory and dead generality into the details of actual life. Popular jesters spread it to the lower classes, and in the comic and farcical branch Shakespeare is most indebted to the past and least

<sup>1</sup> *Sh. Commentaries*, 1849-50 (trans. F. E. Burnett, Smith, Elder, 1863).

original. Comic and sublime came to exist side by side, and to sacred pieces was added that natural realistic character which distinguished the English stage. Shakespeare accepted this mixture of elements, and through their deeper union he doubled the aesthetic and ethical value of his works, using the broadest caricature to convey the profoundest reflections on life. In time the ancient drama, represented by Plautus and Seneca, came to influence the form of the English, but was powerless against the unconstrained Saxon humour, and the dislike of unities. The English drama, unlike the Italian, was built on the broad foundations of the sympathy of all classes.

Shakespeare learned much from Marlowe and Lyly, but he was more discriminating than Lyly and he perfected the style of verse introduced by Marlowe, and abjured his extravagance. All before Shakespeare was promise only; it was he who laid open the way and led to final satisfaction. In his view of art and his moral aim he infinitely surpassed his predecessors, contemporaries, and successors. No great dramatist of any nation has had a wider and stronger foundation for his art, with better prepared materials. The Mysteries gave the necessity for epic fullness of matter—the Moralities ideal ethical thought—the comic Interludes realistic truth to nature—the Middle Ages the romantic matter of the epic-poetic and historical literature—the present the strong passions of a politically excited people, and a society deeply stirred by the religious, scientific, and industrious movements of the age.

*Titus* shows pleasure in suffering innocence and physical horrors: unlike Shakespeare's tragedies where there is sympathy for the terribleness of evil. If he did write it, it would imply an entire later moral and aesthetic revolution: but such things do happen. *Pericles* has no unity of action, only of person—no inner necessity for occurrences, but outer force and blind chance. It has no unity of thought, but at most a moral tendency connects it—the contrast of chastity and unchastity. The outline of the play is not Shakespeare's, but his hand is in those scenes in which there is a natural design in the subject, in which great passions are developed—especially the *Pericles-Marina* scenes.

There is no unity of action or even of person in *1 Henry VI*. If certain loosely united single scenes were omitted the piece would be improved—and such were plays before Shakespeare. The moral of Parts II and III is that man is the forger of his own fate. By contrast with Greene, who had treated the same subject, Shakespeare adds poetry and passion and character-interest. Greene made the King a cipher in the background, Shakespeare delineated his nothingness. The contrast of York to Henry is the soul of both pieces—the relations between the hereditary right of an incapable king who is ruining the country, and the claims of personal merit which save the country. Yet

the drama, as it follows history, creates the thought rather than the thought penetrates and creates the drama.

In the *Errors* Shakespeare gives to the whole extravagant matter of mistakes and intricacies an inner relation to the character of the family. The tragic background does not check the extravagant scenes but makes them more conspicuous, while keeping under the superficial and weak impression of a mere farce. All these pieces, and the *Shrew*, show the uncultured popular taste of the pre-Shakespearian age.

Shakespeare's second period was one of inward self-reliance and outward comfort. He succeeded rapidly as actor and poet, and made honourable connexions and friendships. His erotic pieces do not treat love in the modern sentimental fashion, but he shows love combined with other passions and widely related to other human circumstances. *Verona* gives the essence and power of love, its influence on judgement and habit. Its twofold nature is shown absolutely impartially. Characters and events are related and opposed so that even those of a contrary nature explain each other. Valentine and Proteus are one-sided, but each finds his complement as a corrective. Speed and Launce are like a parody beside the main action which invests the commonest with high moral value. The fine relation of the lower and higher parts is skilfully concealed by the removal of all moralizing. *L.L.L.* is the first of the plays to have a single moral aim in view. Shakespeare demanded equal sense from jest and earnest, and knew that laughers by profession never pierced through the surface. His soundest humorists have the soundest part of the seriousness of life, e.g. Benedict is more perfect than Biron and Mercutio. In *M. Ado*, as in *L.L.L.*, stern reality bursts in on banter, and the couple win each other because they know how to meet these serious demands—the kind that Biron learns after Rosaline's censure. In *M.N.D.* Shakespeare has quite laid aside the great art of an underlying motive, his true magic wand. Caprice is master, and the true intention is not to be sought in the outer shell. The errors of that blind intoxication of the senses—the main point of the piece—appear to us an allegorical picture of the errors of a life of dreams. The fairies are without delicate feeling and morality; they reflect little, but imagination is their kingdom, and ideas conveyed by the senses. They live a luxurious life, indulging the pleasures of the senses, liking the beautiful and hating the ugly, jealousy their only pain. The 'rude mechanicals' leave nothing to the spectators' imagination; while Theseus, the intellectual man, is placed midway between the two. Shakespeare has admirably combined into a whole these skilfully obtained contrasts.

The truth, often emphasized in Shakespeare, predominates in *R. and J.*, that affections and passions are given us to heighten our enjoyment of life, but pursued in an unfair degree they transform pleasure and blessing into curse and ruin. He here shows us the opposite end of all

human passion, love, and hatred in their extremest power. He knows only the fate which man forges for himself; he sees how outward circumstances and inward character work one into the other with alternating effect. But he does not favour more the severe judgement of the reflective mind than the sympathy of the heart. We must look from the abstract idea to the living warmth and richness of the circumstances. The spectator's whole being is called to judge, not only his mind. Thus the view of the whole action is the only way to understand Shakespeare.

Out of idle stories Shakespeare formed the *Merchant*, a piece full of the deepest worldly wisdom. Ulrici and others have defined its central idea as 'summum jus summa injuria'; but essential characters (e.g. Bassanio) do not all stand in relation to the idea, as in maturer works. The story rather grows out of the peculiar nature of the characters. Shakespeare inquires into those qualities and passions which could commit such an action, and presents the springs of these passions. His purpose appears not from the story, but from close investigation of the motives of the actors. Here he intends to depict the relation of man to property. At this time the idea prevailed with him that, both in public and private life, merit, deeds, character, education, inner worth surpass ancestral right, rank, and outward pretensions. He profoundly abhors all physical and moral tinsel and varnish in man. Money is the image of show, and by means of characters and circumstances we see how its possession brings out the lowest vices or highest virtues. Yet the question of man's relation to property is also one of his relation to man. This piece is a song of true friendship; it contrasts unselfish spiritual affection with selfish worldly affection. Friendship is freer from selfishness than sexual love, and is most truly tested by the exact opposite, the point of possession. Bassanio may seem a parasite, and unfriendly to borrow money, but Antonio knows that he has a better nature—and this is proved by his choice of the casket. Shylock has been made a martyr, but it is avarice that has hardened him, not religious bigotry. Money has affected him in the opposite way to Antonio, and effaced all that is human in his heart.

Shakespeare searched history only for inner truth, and rejected facts that did not suit his unity. The actions of historical characters influence a wider circle, and therefore another moral standard exists for history. The ruling idea of the eight pieces of York and Lancaster is the conflicting claim between the hereditary right of the good but incapable who endanger the State, and the capable but bad who save the State. The motive for Richard III's villainy is his deformity; ambition is his spring of action, hypocrisy his means. His actual nature is at variance with hypocrisy—he is passionate, nervous, sensitive. He plays a huge variety of assumed parts, but there is a fundamental note which unites them all. Shakespeare makes inclination to brutality innate in him,

and hypocrisy the chosen means for his ambition. The young Princes are delineated in a masterly way; in both the opposite qualities of hypocrisy and candour become natural and human. Edward shows respect and caution, York impulsive but tempered expression. Even these two are finely related to the main idea of the piece. The thought of *Richard II* is purely political and historical. His fall is one of Shakespeare's immortal lessons on the royalty of God's grace and the law of inviolability. Bolingbroke is a king by nature, and when his property is confiscated he seeks relief in search for redress, while Richard sinks at the approach of misfortune.

With Henry IV, as with Richard III, Shakespeare is occupied with the difference between what a man is and appears. Henry does not dissimulate, but conceals his nature and only exhibits its good side. At the summit of good fortune he finds neither peace nor rest, and so beyond the political theme appears the moral centre of thought. Percy is the most living character delineated in poetry, the ideal of genuine and perfect manliness and active nature. How can the Prince compete with him, who seems more at war with the State than Percy? Perhaps, like his father, the Prince acts from policy, only the reverse kind. A good conscience appears through his carelessness, unlike the father who is oppressed with suspicion and anguish. Appearance is against this wonderful man, who is sure in himself of the perfect essence of genuine humanity. He sports with public opinion because he knows he can give it the lie. He was too free-souled to conform himself hourly to the monotony of royal dignity; he could not pursue glory and honour as the compulsory service of a business imposed upon him. He kills Percy, but is content with inward dignity, and gives the credit to Falstaff. The foundation of his character is to be true and faithful to Nature and not overstrain her, and thus he retained fresh powers which easily achieved what others laboured after. Henry IV conceives of honour outwardly; Percy wishes to deserve it by action and moral worth; the Prince is urged on by noble self-reliance. He spiritualizes and refines the idea of honour into the true dignity of man, and to know that he possesses it consoles him for the world's bad opinion. Falstaff has no idea of honour, and is only moved by selfishness. He personifies man's inferior side, his animal and sensual nature; yet we do not abhor but delight in him, and the liveliness of the picture and blending of ideal with individual make him a typical character. But crimes are not absolvable because Falstaff committed them, and if we object to the Prince's judgement we fall short of him, and of Shakespeare also, in moral severity and nobility and man's true dignity. *2 Henry IV*, *Henry V*, and the *Wives* have the least aesthetic value of Shakespeare's works, but great moral value; they continue the history of *1 Henry IV* almost entirely with a moral aim. Readers lose much of their pleasure and interest in Falstaff in Part II. When the Prince

overhears his heartless mockery at him before an utterly reprobate being, how shall he longer waste his heart on him? The play is a counterpart to the *Merchant*, and shows how deeply Shakespeare reflected on true and apparent worth. In one we see the apparent worth of men in outward possessions, in the other, the apparent worth of outward authority and esteem. Bassanio deals lightly with money, and the Prince deals carelessly with outward honour. As Henry V he shows his grand feature—profound modesty. He gives the honour of Agincourt to God, and his whole bearing sounds the key-note of religious composure. In disparaging the French Shakespeare succumbs to the weakness of the age and expresses national narrow-mindedness.

John's throne rests on possession more than right; he is no brutal tyrant, but of hard manly nature, moved by personal interest. He does not reverence his mother, but respects her political wisdom. Contrast the political relation between the usurper and his mother, and the entirely maternal relation of Constance and Arthur. The weakness of Constance amounts to grandeur, and her virtues sink to weakness. Falconbridge's moral instinct is of a texture not too tender. So long as the King does not break divine laws, he identifies king with country. To preserve the land and make it strong is more to him than lawful right to the crown.

Shakespeare considered man's feeling of his value and vocation as the true ground and soil of all human virtues. Henry V, Portia, Posthumus are developed in pure, noble self-reliance; the medium is attained between jest and earnest, and the character reaches its height. Where self-reliance rises into egotism, ambition, love of fame, and other unbridled passions tragedy appears. When self-reliance sinks into self-love, vanity, conceit there is comedy. Egotism is the root of the tragic character, self-love of the comic. Self-love makes Claudio (*M. Ado*) sensitive on honour, and causes Benedict and Beatrice to despise the other sex. The *Wives* is the only play where the plot outweighs the characters. Shakespeare stresses the honest knavery that defeats cunning. Self-conceited cunning that makes light of honesty is the soul of the play.

In *A.Y.L.* social position and qualities are more in question than moral characteristics. Mental character and intellectuality are more to be displayed than power of will and motive for important actions. The moral is content and resignation, and the root idea praise of self-mastery and equanimity. That Jaques finds forest life as foolish as court, and blames the whole world, shows again Shakespeare's two-sided mind. Those who would enjoy life must be naturally disposed to moderation and self-mastery, and able to do without outward happiness. Orlando and Rosalind bear with them a spring of happiness. Happiness dwells not in this or that place, but in beings who have a capacity for either or every other kind of existence. The characters of

*M. Ado*, used to prosperity, are betrayed into giddiness and then alarmed by a tragic incident. Claudio is spoiled by success, and even Leonato has grown negligent from prosperity. Benedict and Beatrice have equal self-love and are spoilt by prosperity, but they also have giddiness, that is, unstable opinions. Changeableness appears in action, giddiness in contrary processes of the mind, comic because harmless. Pride of intellect is the strong point of Benedict's self-love, therefore he is hurt at the nickname of jester. He is against marriage from mistrust of women's fidelity. Beatrice is equally affected by serious blame, and she has the same nice taste in men. The plot to make them love is founded on the self-love of both. The church scene stirs up the soul of Beatrice into perfect contrast with what we have seen her. She sees that there are times when women depend on assistance. What concerns us in *Twelfth-Night*, as in all the other plays, is not the plot, the outward rule of the action, but the actors and their nature and motives—not the effect, but the cause and the agencies. Love in itself, without desert, is represented as a folly. Shakespeare investigates the nature of the beings who could fall into the error of a hopeless passion. From lack of self-knowledge Malvolio's follies and caprices grow to gigantic size. Sir Andrew, by contrast, shows what a man would be without self-love. The Duke makes it his sole business to nurture his love, but is more in love with love than his mistress. Olivia opposes pride of character to the Duke's pride of rank, but to some extent she is unjust, for she never tried to know the Duke. Feste is not related to the main idea, but opposed to the separate characters. He observes the mood of those on whom he jests, and he can be a guide to the most important parts of the play.

The Sonnets reveal in Shakespeare a strength of feeling and passion, a childlike nature and a candid mind, a simple ingenuousness, and a perfect inability to veil his thoughts or dissemble, an innate capacity for allowing circumstances to act upon his mind, and reacting to them. He felt his position of actor, and this depressed him more than his deeds. It is indeed touching that a mind great enough to stand above the prejudices of all ages should succumb to the weight of this depressing popular feeling. It is difficult now to understand how great was his inner struggle. This metamorphosis of moral purification and transformation was a necessity in so richly gifted a man and an important stage of development. According to the Sonnets, this purification derived its impetus from intercourse with his noble friend. We see now why the moral of the plays of the period was that true nobility was alone that of virtue and merit. The culmination is Prince Henry who was satisfied with the self-consciousness that needs not outer praise. Henry withdrew unnoticed into retirement, and Shakespeare cared little for the fate of his works.

In his third period he takes a wider range, but he places comic scenes

in tragedies, and is therefore not sunk in melancholy. Angelo (*M. for M.*) lays greater stress on appearance than reality, and is nervous for his reputation. The Duke remembers his behavior to Marina and wishes to test him. The said breach of faith shows how Angelo aspired after rank, property, and importance. It is natural that Isabella's mind and beauty and virtue should overpower him, but the remembrance of Mariana would check honourable thoughts of marriage, and so the first outrage is the source of a greater. The actor must let his original nobility show through his errors. Is it impossible that he should repent? Isabella pleads for him, and Mariana will keep him with all his faults. The spirit of the play is that jealous justice is not true justice, that neither mercy nor rigid law must prevail alone, but that which punishes *with* measure. Extremes are bad—such as the Duke's mildness which fostered crime, and Angelo's severity which erred through exaggeration. Angelo by severity counterbalances the Duke, by sobriety Claudio, by heartlessness Mariana, by care for show Lucio. Isabella stands between these extremes as the type of complete human nature, making moderation the true moral centre of gravity.

We must not only discuss moral-social theories or feelings, but experience. Of all Shakespeare's plays *Othello* can be most richly applied to circumstances, showing how the wilfulness of children often produces greater tragedies than parental tyranny. Shakespeare works the miracle of ennobling jealousy, one of the lowest of men's passions. Othello lacked the influences that tame passion—early education and conventional habits. He had lived among dangers, was credulous and imaginative, and must have believed that he had seen the marvels of distant regions of which he spoke to Desdemona. In Venice he was honoured by all but the higher classes, and he felt the finger of scorn pointed at him. He is self-controlled and large-hearted, yet we never lose the impression that his self-reliance is not unassailably firm: his success and reputation are weighed in a fluctuating balance with his secret discontent. The ground of Iago's malevolence is dissatisfaction at the perfection of others, aversion to good in itself. His character has been called impossible, yet in the historical Richard III Shakespeare found a man who had actually committed more unnatural deeds than Iago. The first and highest aim of tragic poetry is to show how man originates his own fate: therefore perhaps Iago's plans were forwarded by vague consciousness of guilt in his victims. Othello is overpowered by the idea that his endless happiness may be a delusion; for all false jealousy rests on mere imagination. She by her innocence provokes him to regard her as a shameless criminal. We see the unhappy effects of their different nature and descent. It is now revenged on her that she abandoned the paternal home and surrendered herself to the stranger. She has no idea of what is passing in his mind; there would always have been a gap between them; for both souls veil their



innermost thoughts from each other, and in the hour of death he will not believe her oath. He punishes not in wrath, but from the feeling of honour. The allusion to Aleppo is significant: then it was for the honour of Venice. Her death is a sacrifice, and his an atonement to the manes of the broken-hearted father. Shakespeare does not condemn every unequal marriage; it is not the letter of the law but the circumstances and nature of men that produce good and evil.

Next to *Henry IV*, *Hamlet* has the most express information of Shakespeare's character and nature. As Goethe said, Hamlet's reason was disturbed by the shock of too difficult a task. He has the will to revenge, but cannot act: as the King has the will to pray, but cannot renounce the crown and Queen. Contrast Laertes who hazards 'both the worlds' to avenge such a man as Polonius—while Hamlet forgets the hero who rises from the grave to admonish him. Hamlet owes to heated imagination his sensitive excitability and also his faint-heartedness. He believes in ghosts and therefore sees them, and by excess of excitement blunts the edge of purpose and action. Created for happiness, he is witty, and rather suited for comedy than tragedy. He is a counterpart to Prince Henry, who knew something of melancholy, but under different conditions pursued his cheerful way till he became aware of the solemn grandeur of his vocation. The Prince surpassed expectations, but Hamlet fell short of royal hopes and was ill-prepared for his mission. What makes Hamlet irresolute, and also makes him an essentially tragic character, is weakness subtly combined with conscientiousness and virtue. He is a man of letters, at home among scholars and actors, and when he convicts the King through the play, what first occupies him is not fearful evidence of the crime, but pleasure in his skill as actor or poet. This leads him to feign madness and sustain his part. What Shakespeare shows is how by one-sided training of the mind the working side of our nature is crippled and fettered. Shakespeare has the condescension of a superior towards him, since what he lacks alone gives man true value. Convinced that active life is the only real life, he has depicted Prince Henry and Harry Percy with such glad preference. An idealist unequal to the real world, Hamlet is a type of the German race at the present day.

Hamlet is excessively weak—Macbeth strains human might and manly audacity to the utmost, and dares even Fate—Prince Henry is the medium. Macbeth has the simple soldier-nature, with no power to dissimulate. Contrary to Hamlet, by innate manly power he overcomes both conscience and fancy. But his strong imagination is apt to weaken his resolve, and he rushes into action to escape mental struggle and terror. The Witches have no mechanical power over man, but all that Shakespeare's spirit-world signifies is the visible embodiment of images conjured up by a lively fancy. As we see from the warning against Macduff, they do but rouse to watchfulness the

slumbering thoughts of his soul. Lady Macbeth is his antitype, calm in judgement and cold in blood, and after the deed she could speedily have forgotten. Not wholly bad, she has to call on hellish spirits to unsex her. She has something of a spectator's security in the game, which she loses when she attempts to act—e.g. she cannot do the deed for the resemblance—but recovers when she returns to her first position. She finds the needed courage and resolve in her boundless confidence in the strong man to whom she trusts everything. This distinguishes her nature and prevents her from wholly forfeiting our pity. Here she becomes rather the dependent wife than the masculine woman, and her ambition is for him. When he is ruined her powers fail, and she doubts herself because she doubts him. The aim of the play was to lead Macbeth from a noble disposition, amid temptations of ambition and pride, to security—i.e. hardening in sin, dependence on human power, contempt of divine law. Richard III stifles conscience, but, unlike Macbeth, he can be happy.

The representation of the strongest passions gives scope to the strongest poetic genius. Shakespeare attained his highest excellence in describing unrestrained humanity. In *Lear* the advance is ever on the increase, with a gain of richness, extent, compressed fullness. It approaches to epic, and inclines from single figures to delineation in groups. It is as hard to find characters for higher tragical parts in the civilized present as the latest past. The ancients sought their plots in pre-Trojan days—the houses of Laius and Tantalus—colossal manhood, demigods, and Titans. The wanton growth of impulse and passion was natural to certain races, and we know from the well-authenticated history of the Burgundian and Merovingian houses that such times and men existed, that family horrors, as in *Lear*, have abounded for centuries among Christian races. *Lear* shows a race in whom the resistance of reason and conscience over passion is powerless or dead. The time is heathenish, with chance above, force below, and no terrifying powers of imagination. Those who die do so without remorse, and the better natures fall from happiness to despair. All is in extremes, even goodness, and we see uncultivated humanity, without religious ordinances, moral laws, or ripeness of experience. Relationship sets the first limit and destroys the individual's selfishness, but here self-love rends even these strongest ties of nature. All the characters are a prey to violent emotions; *Lear's* curse on Goneril is without parallel in any tragedy on a similar subject. Had she retained a spark of humanity this curse would have quenched it. To the aged, overburdened man, madness is the natural result of unnatural strain on his mind. Kent and the Fool belong to the age in so far as they augment rather than alleviate *Lear's* pangs. Cordelia's death is Shakespeare's strongest instance of ethical justice. Edgar survives because he has exercised wise forethought and well-related means to aims; whereas

Cordelia attacks England with a French force to rescue her father.<sup>1</sup> Had Lear lived and triumphed with Cordelia, revenge might have governed him again and prevented him from attaining to that peace to which the poet intends to lead him. The death of his child forcibly retains him in that peace and gentleness in which he is to depart to a better life. Cordelia is one of the angel forms in Shakespeare's plays, for whom death is but the entrance to their happy home. The monsters of the race destroy one another.

*Cymbeline* is a companion piece to *Lear*, its subject, as that of *Lear*, formed by the combination of two different actions, derived from widely different sources, against a larger political and military background. Imogen is Shakespeare's most lovely and artless female character, and his most fully-drawn character after Hamlet. Fidelity is the cardinal virtue of a heroic age, e.g. the *Odyssey*. In insecure times nothing is more valuable than a true friend, servant, wife: Kent and Lear, Achilles and Patroclus. Closely examined in this character, the play gains in universal significance and moral depth, perhaps above all others. Posthumus and Imogen maintain their fidelity inviolate, and this constancy under trial gains another purity and splendour *after* sorrow and defilement. Tried virtue has a higher value than untried, and this wisdom underlies the craving for the world of the two youths, and also the wager. Contrast *Cymbeline* who is but a cipher. In reading *T. and C.* we need understanding more than sympathy, and accordingly the characters occupy the mind as symbols rather than the heart. And his strength had to show itself in a sententious wisdom which he has never equalled elsewhere, and is a noble contrast to the burlesque action. The absence of moral cause places the story in deep gloom, and the outstanding truth is that the noblest poetry without a strong moral principle is not what it might be and should be.

Plutarch appealed so closely to Shakespeare's head and heart that he followed the text closely, and converted it wonderfully into the drama of *J.C.* It is no easy task to refer persons and actions to one idea, to seek this idea out of the most general historical truths, and to employ only the actual historical personages to represent this idea. What seems an artless transcript of history produces an ingenious theatrical effect. Brutus stands between Hamlet and Macbeth, equal to them in intensity of emotions, but concealing them with a veil of heroic calmness and the accepted character of the determined politician. A deed of greater weight is laid on Brutus than on Hamlet or Macbeth—to prevent an injustice as yet only apprehended. The soul of the play is to depict the struggle between personal feelings and public duty. Brutus is as humanely noble as Cassius is politically superior, and each lacks what is best in the other. Cassius gives way to Brutus where he ought not—in questions of strategy—as Brutus had formerly given way where he

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Röscher and Ulrici.

ought not. The union of two such dissimilar beings revenges itself on both. Brutus by his political weakness ruins the conspirators who sought in him a cloak for their moral weakness; and they ruin him by seducing him. *A. and C.* has no noble character or elevating feature in the action. It shows how much we should lose in Shakespeare if these did not go hand in hand with his knowledge of men and nature, on one side aesthetic excellence (ideal concentration of actors and actions) and on the other ethical excellence (ideal elevation of the representation of manhood). He drew a veil over Antony's vices and made him interesting through brilliant natural gifts. After Actium Antony could be happy with Cleopatra alone; and the last two acts deal with their personal relations. Creeping discord is heard, because inner adornment and worth of character are lacking, on which alone true love, fidelity, happiness can be founded. Coriolanus has to choose between patriotism and private feelings of hatred. The nature of the characters who have to decide was always the centre towards which Shakespeare worked. Coriolanus has lofty pride and ambition, but also obstinacy begotten of selfishness. It has been said that Shakespeare took the arbitrary side, but he was too impartial to be exclusive; he had depicted Brutus and Cassius with more love than the aristocrat Coriolanus. The extreme in the nature of Coriolanus passes into its opposite—bravery into jealousy that took away honourable aim—fury and passion to forced calm—pride to modesty. *Timon* expresses the same truth as the *Merchant*—that all extremes are hurtful. Excess of love and beneficence turns to excess of misanthropy.

The *Tempest* has the same overruling idea as *Timon* and the works of the third period. It represents the unnatural rupture of natural ties by oppression, falsehood, and ingratitude. The charm of Prospero's character is that severity does not detract from his goodness. His moral excellence is more powerful than his magic, and he is the humane reverse of his inhuman enemies. Ariel has risen through Prospero to half-human sympathies. An unnatural bond between man and spirit is made possible by suave manners, dignity, benefit, gratitude; whereas men with moral sense and reason unnaturally break nature's strongest ties—those between brother and brother. Shakespeare could not entirely concentrate the two actions of the *W. Tale*, but connected them indistinctly by a leading idea in both. The point of union is where in the second part we have a love incompatible from a parental and conventional point of view, as in the first there was a suspected love inadmissible on conjugal and moral grounds.

So far from neglecting rules, as some critics have said, Shakespeare created an enlarged sphere of art. He sought no ready-made rule, but the inner law of the given matter—agreement of form with subject according to indwelling laws, not external rule. Aristotle's most essential law was unity of action; and here Shakespeare absolutely

complied with Aristotle. Aristotle preferred external complications, but in modern times it is impossible to separate action and character. In Shakespeare's art they penetrate each other as in nature, e.g. the deeds in *Lear* are not more cruel than the characters are wild. Only Homer's and Shakespeare's characters are obtained out of the whole of humanity—nature itself. Shakespeare's characters are perfectly and intricately blended with their passions and impulses. Inexhaustible as nature, no two individuals resemble one another. They are individuals, but artistically generalized—their passions raised from particular to general truth. A predominant quality, a main impulse, is a law of character. Shakespeare's main law is unity of character, and what unifies the character unifies the play. He found the root of the action in the nature of the acting character, and thence remodelled the fiction, rejecting everything extraneous and unessential. When he combined second actions he unified them in spirit, he did not unite two heterogeneous actions like Ben Jonson. The inner connexion of Shakespeare's two actions constituted their unity, and this is a great and astonishing enrichment of art. He was no unconscious vessel of pure revelation, but criticism of his plays must have awakened in him reflection, and he had to learn the technicality of art. His was the highest regularity, as if Nature had entrusted to him the secret of her organization.

The law of art is to elevate us to a fairer existence. It proves that the human soul delights in a more perfect order than can be found in nature. Does this affect our statement that moral and psychological truth counted more with Shakespeare than aesthetic beauty? Does it confine our admiration to his nature and reality? No, his ideal vein shows in everything, and no art works with such united powers and means on the human fancy as the drama. Representation makes us dwell not on words, but on the action, and this brings out the ideal effect. The characters are necessarily true to nature, but when placed beside life, their ideal character and typical greatness appear, e.g. in Homer even Paris is a hero. Compared with the Greek, the realistic element is strong, for the conditions of ancient art were simpler, and it is difficult to reach spirit through the mass of real matter. In modern times human nature, society, &c., are immensely dilated, and the whole wide world and its history must be mastered. Yet if we have lost outward beauty and put on the inward disguise of hypocrisy, at least the individual is developed, the mind elaborated, and the character given energy. Southern art preferred beauty of outward form; Northern, from deficiencies of external nature, cultivated inner and spiritual. Through this art-ideal, in which truth, goodness, and beauty go hand in hand, Shakespeare belongs wholly to the Germanic race and the Northern style of taste. From the Spanish drama solely concerned with honour, Germany over-reacted and went below nature; but

Shakespeare kept the medium between the two extremes. Honour with him is merit, and morally he gives the truly human and natural, and strives after original purity of life. His matter must be human, necessary, of general value, with nothing accidental or arbitrary: this is the true. He clothes truth with the appearance of reality: this is the beautiful. The grasp of his mind shows him to be a peculiarly modern poet; but in the purity, naturalness, and simplicity of his art he is like a poet of antiquity. With the greatest subjectivity he is objective in his poetry, and resigns his personality as completely as the ancients.

The England of Elizabeth was the chief inheritor of the European treasures of cultivation in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Italy was exhausted inwardly, and Spain outwardly, and Germany was preoccupied with religion. In England Catholicism was over and Puritanism had not begun, and Shakespeare could therefore give to the age the basis of a natural mode of feeling, thought, and life upon which art prospers in its purest form. Shakespeare and Bacon were the two lawgivers—in poetry and philosophy; and Shakespeare balanced the one-sided errors of the imagination by reason, reality, and nature—as Bacon led philosophy away from the one-sided errors of reason to experience. Bacon banished religion from science, and Shakespeare from art. Bacon insisted on the practical use of philosophy, and Shakespeare's poetry aimed throughout at bearing upon the moral life.

Shakespeare builds a system of morality on nature and reason, independent of religion, and without direct precepts. Morality was as much his object as poetry itself, and his art is great, because out of the whole of life he absorbed more of the moral element than any other writer. To join poetry to life by moral cement, even to sacrifice outer beauty to higher morality—this was his aim. Like no other poet he taught that the object of civilization is to tame the passions. One noble impulse uplifts man more than a hundred precepts. The reasonable should become an impulse, so that passion should be harmless, and man, completed, should reconcile reason and passion, sense and mind. Ideal characters matter less than that this balance should stand out as the healthful aim of human efforts. Shakespeare knew passion like no one else, and must have known it by experience, yet with this he combined the high self-command which enabled him to give an unbiased delineation of it, and in this he showed his ideal mind. He fulfilled the law that tragedy must purify the mind, apart from rewards or punishments. He excites a nobler fear long before the issue, and makes us watchful of our own souls. He unites with the fear of the dangerous course of passion the sympathy with what is bold and great in it—with all that Bacon discovered in strong passion to be kindred with passion. When the passions are purified we are transported to the intermediate state between doing and suffering, in which, unconstrained,

we are affected by both. To discover his mode of thought we must consider the relation to each other of the dramatic styles, and the moral justice displayed in the development of the actions.

Passion disintegrating a noble nature is the subject of Shakespeare's tragedies. In the struggle the better contrary nature rises, and also a spiritual power not opposed to but connected with the ruling passion. Lear's whole nature is purified, but John and Antony are least tragic because their better nature is most feebly aroused. Comedy deals with the weakness of men, the false steps of reason. Angelo is almost comic when governed by reason, and becomes tragic when passion prevails. Some comic characters err through self-satisfaction and are insensible to the mischievous joy of others; and this is the essence of those comic characters that survive all changes of taste. The moral law triumphs in comedy as in tragedy; the catastrophe passes from vanity to disappointment, and we hope that the actor may return from his erring ways. This is just, for if the moral does not rise victorious out of the ruin of vice the work of art only gives pain. Shakespeare did not degrade virtue and vice to a calculation of loss and gain, but he made the fates of his characters accord with their nature and actions. There are times when he does not deprive us of the consolation of religion, e.g. in *Cymbeline* the severity of Providence appears as protecting love. Faith in the future compensation must reconcile us to the lot of the innocent victims in some of the tragedies. Shakespeare is averse to the theory that happiness is the aim of life; but the question remains not *what* the issue is, but *how* it is. Cordelia dies in the glory of a blessed deliverer, Lear in expiation, Gloucester smiling; but the others, caught in their own snares, robbed of their aims, worldly souls, forfeit the world which was all to them. The sublime moral lesson is that death in itself is no evil, life itself no blessing, and outward prosperity no happiness, but inner consciousness is all in all; that virtue's greatest reward is virtue itself, and vice's greatest punishment vice itself.

Shakespeare avoided religion in favour of the revelation which God has written in the human heart. He had to do with action, where the religious and divine in man is the moral. Energy is the manly virtue, e.g. Fortinbras, Bolingbroke, Alcibiades, Octavius. The womanly soul attracts Shakespeare in which morality is innate, and the antagonistic powers of freedom and natural impulse are peacefully united. He approved moderation, and even opposed those Christian laws which would overstrain human nature. Excessive liberality ruins Timon, while moderate liberality keeps Antonio in honour. Shakespeare lays down no positive law of religion on morals, but leaves it to ourselves to find the middle line. He is too much of a poet to undervalue religious belief, but also too free-thinking to display any one fixed form of religion except as a characteristic attribute. From the belief in immortality he drew the soundest conclusion that all hinges on

a right use of this life. In politics, as we see from the Roman plays, he appreciates all political forms. From his views on property and the family (*Richard II*, *T. and C.*, *Othello*) we see how widely he differed from modern political free-thinkers. He sympathizes with the destitute—but Cade's rebellion shows his opinion on communism. To sum up his character we must extract the sentiments of his writings and fix our minds on those that most frequently recur. The relative majority express the same character as Henry V. He delights in hearty fellows of rough exterior, such as Falconbridge. He is most charmed by unostentatious virtue and extreme humility joined to splendid endowments. It creates the highest self-content, and is the greatest contrast to the insipid conduct of the world which rests on vanity, show, and folly. His love of truth surpassed every other quality, and his many-sidedness depends on his impartiality. Because he was unbiased he could do justice to everything, and appeal to all—and the sectarian finds least in him. We see his portrait in Henry V, who was adapted for every business and every society. His favourite characters unite the most contradictory qualities—Hamlet, Posthumus, Portia—and he most dislikes the one-sided—Iago, Cassio, Leontes. With him, inclination and will, moral efforts and understanding harmonize. From the aesthetic point of view the ideal and beautiful in his art concur with the truth of his sensual and spiritual intention; from the ethical, the good and moral coincide with this same truth, so that there emerges the same one, entire, normal being. . . .

Gervinus has been called a second Dogberry who bestowed all his tediousness upon the world; but we protest mildly against so harsh a verdict. He is the most well-meaning of critics, and his good intentions at least do something to redeem what we must admit to be the prose-level of his commentary. Yet the emotion is two-edged, for having raised our hopes by the awe and admiration with which he approaches Shakespeare, he disappoints them by his interpretation in detail of the plays. We therefore conclude that there is something wrong with his point of view, and it is the disproportionate stress which he lays upon action—with the result that inner is sacrificed to outer, the spiritual world to the material.

We are aware of the opinion of some modern critics that every thought has its equivalent in sense, every mental process its physical representative. Mr. T. S. Eliot, for instance, conjectures that Shakespeare found nothing in the outer world to correspond with Hamlet's disgust at his mother's remarriage, and therefore the play remains obscure. We also know that Carlyle and others maintain thought without action to be demoralizing. On the other hand, Mr. Lascelles Abercrombie says that romanticism appears when inner experience assumes the first importance, and still more when it assumes the only importance in the composite fact of life; and that romanticism can be



most precisely defined as a tendency to rely on inner experience.<sup>1</sup> Man lives for himself as well as plays a part among men: as a planet rotates on its own axis besides revolving round the universal sun. By brooding over its past experience and speculating on the future the soul expands; and the reason of some of Gervinus's unsatisfactory verdicts is that he does not appreciate the self-enriched soul.

He says that Beatrice is drawn to Benedict because she sees that there are times when women depend on assistance. He discovers in Othello a secret discontent because he is not treated as an equal by the Venetian higher classes. The allusion to Aleppo proves for him that Othello killed Desdemona for reasons of honour. (Our thoughts go forward to Professor Bradley whose whole conception of Othello is enriched by the word 'Aleppo'.) He finds Iago possible because Richard III had committed more unnatural deeds. Because Hamlet is witty he is more suited to comedy. Henry V is a medium between Hamlet and Macbeth. Cordelia dies because she attacked England with a French army. A weightier deed is laid on Brutus than Hamlet or Macbeth. Suave manners, &c., make possible the unnatural bond between Prospero and Ariel. John is named in the same sentence with Lear and Antony. Henry V is Shakespeare's own portrait. *Cymbeline* is compared with *Lear*. A schoolboy less all-knowing than Macaulay's could see that it is possible to extract from *A.T.L.* such a moral as Gervinus draws.

But there are some occasions when understanding is helped by the predominating outer world. Thus, it is avarice that has hardened Shylock; and Richard III's actual nature is at variance with hypocrisy. The estimate of *John* is among the most satisfying: the contrast of kingship and life's ordinary relations having a ready-made spiritual meaning that the critic cannot abolish. History shows that there have been family horrors as in *Lear*. To those who call Shakespeare anti-democratic he replies that he has depicted Brutus and Cassius with more love than Coriolanus. The wicked characters of *Lear* are caught in their own snares and forfeit the world which is all to them. However, the general effect is that Gervinus assumes the mantle of a prophet and engages the reader's attention, and then speaks in commonplace language.

It follows inevitably that we must contradict his opinion that Shakespeare's art was based upon morality. The beautiful includes the good, and Gervinus missed the romantic spirit. He concentrated upon action, and failed to see the halo of beauty with which the mind surrounds itself in its solitary musings. In his day the beautiful was regarded as separate from the good: and this path led him downwards from Shakespeare rather than upwards with Shakespeare. His method of searching each play for a theory, which he interprets according to contemporary

<sup>1</sup> *Romanticism* (1926), p. 125.

moral standards, completes his earth-bound character. And the secret of Shakespeare's self is opened to him by the number of identical sentiments scattered through the plays rather than the degree of inspiration of each sentiment. And we discover in his mind the same non-conducting substance as in Ulrici's. If Professor Bradley had never read *Othello* the world would have lost the surpassing page where he wonders what Othello was doing in Aleppo—notes the poet's eye with which he watched the gum dropping from the Arabian trees, and the mingling of the waters of the Pontic and Propontic—and decides that nothing in his whole previous romantic career was more romantic than his marriage to Desdemona; but if Gervinus had never read the *Merchant of Venice*, a dozen other works of art would have served him equally well to express the same ideas on man and property. Yet he is a critic to be taken seriously, because he proves the ideal nature of represented action by discovering that in Homer even Paris is a hero. Also, though we do not agree that the seemingly disparate parts of plays are united by moral precepts, he sets us wondering as to the cause of the miracle. How did Shakespeare contrive that such a play as *Twelfth-Night*, for instance, with its several actions, should leave a single impression? No one can flutter the Sibylline leaves in vain—least of all a learned and earnest-minded man. It seemed to Jebb that all through the *Bacchae* of Euripides there was a flashing of divine light. Pentheus, though unaware of the god's presence, was the means by which he struck awe and terror into the hearts of others. When his palace was ablaze he thought the cause was earthly fire; and when the god delivered him to the raging women a column of flame rose up between heaven and earth.

### III

IT remains to compare the most general views of these two critics. Ulrici says that Shakespeare's work is as ethical as it is poetic; that the ethical view of life is incompatible either with atheism, pantheism, or naturalism; and that everything points to the inmost essence of all religious life—purely moral sentiment. His view generally coincided with leading Christian ideas, though not with dogma. He gives ethical relation to drama, and his moral greatness is a main lever of his genius. The whole has an inner spiritual unity. His idealism is based on the soundest and soberest knowledge of real life.

Gervinus comments on his noble law of art and high moral aim. We may rely more on his infallibility in moral things than on his aesthetic faultlessness. His principal aspect was not abstract-philosophical, but moral-psychological. There is spiritual unity, and he who knows how to search for the substance of any given action will light on such a moral-psychological kernel. By estimating motives we

perceive his moral spirit. He builds a system of morality on nature and reason independent of religion.<sup>1</sup> He was anti-sectarian.

Ulrici says that he established modern drama by finding its artistic form. His principle of grouping was contrasts of character; and all the parts are held together by invisible threads. He blends tragic and comic in the unity of the action and of the fundamental idea of the whole; and the action develops out of its fundamental idea. According to Gervinus he referred every part to one aspect of his subject, and related every character to it; but the regulating hand is not too apparent. He made laws for the drama and gave it a higher value. He used the horrors of coarse tragedy for higher moral and artistic aim; and he shows his strength in developing great characters and great mental concussions.

All his characters live, says Ulrici; and he depicts the history of the soul in all its stages. With Gervinus, only Homer's and Shakespeare's characters are obtained out of the whole of humanity—Nature herself. Gervinus also thinks that Shakespeare's women are his highest characters.

Ulrici notes the firm and solid stamp of his character; also that no other poet shows such ardent love of friendship. His conception of life was aristocratic. Gervinus dwells on his candour and impartiality, on his tolerant many-sidedness, amiability, and love of truth. He calls him a cheerful, large-hearted man, uniting mildness and severity, self-discipline and freedom. He refutes the 'aristocratic' charge, and says that there was nothing exclusive in Shakespeare. . . .

On the moral question it is remarkable how closely the two critics agree, though perhaps Gervinus emphasizes more than Ulrici Shakespeare's anti-sectarian spirit, and the basis is reality of his ethical system. As always with German writers, we see the world of pure thought like a shadow over the external forms of life.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Birch and Watkiss Lloyd.

## Chapter XVI

### FRANCE 1851-1860

I. CHASLES. II. GUIZOT. III. MÉZIÈRES. IV. CONCLUSION.

**G**ENIUS, says Philarète Chasles,<sup>1</sup> does not invent: Shakespeare was indifferent to his subject. Originality is in the artist, not the materials which he uses. Shakespeare differed from his fellow-dramatists in that he was a philosopher; he rises from the particular to all that is general in human nature. *Macbeth*, *Othello*, *Hamlet* are sublime generalities: the remorse of ambition, the fanaticism of love, the mortal uncertainty of gloomy meditation. Such are the manners of the sixteenth century in London; they reproduce the epoch itself, its movement and chaos. Shakespeare has been called gross, but he is the purest and most modest writer of his time. An uncivilized population needed to be amused, and the theatre fulfilled the part of vaudeville, opera, newspaper, and popular novel. The torrent of new ideas rushed towards the drama.

The year 1603 is a landmark in Shakespeare's development, when he became acquainted with Plutarch and Montaigne. At the outset of his career he had many obstacles to contend with—the jealousy of rivals, the crude old-fashioned theatre, his own inexperience, poverty, and imperfect education. By the year 1603 he had overcome the worst, and yielded his soul to the fascination of antiquity and philosophy. Like Montaigne he was gentle, tolerant, non-sectarian. So far he had only written of love and social absurdities; from now onward his works are permeated by philosophy. Compare *Errors* (1591) with *J.C.* (1603) which contains all the philosophy of the world. Shakespeare was the same man in 1599 as in 1602, and yet in 1603 he gave forth philosophic ideas, doubts on life and death, meditations of strangely mixed irony and good temper—never thought of in 1599. Montaigne's speculations on the savage life and mankind's possible return to the simple liberty of the Golden Age, without laws or rulers, are transferred to the *Tempest* with wonderful taste and vividness. We find Montaigne in *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *Coriolanus*. Between his fortieth and fiftieth years Shakespeare thought little of the future of his works, but devoted himself with the passion of an artist to express his thought perfectly. He has been falsely estimated, and called a 'monstrous genius', whereas he is a sceptical poet, an observer calm and often cruel, brother of Montaigne, looking on men with pity and irony, and profoundly condemning the strokes of fortune which uplift or crush them. He is no coarse peasant with a spark of genius, sublime by chance, but a melan-

<sup>1</sup> *L'Angleterre au seizième Siècle*, 1851.

choly, absorbed soul, a man of polished manners, friend of Southampton and favourite of Elizabeth—yet solitary in the press of people. Externally his works are popular drama, but at their centre is a philosophy. He not only describes what men do, feel, and suffer, but what they dream.

It must be admitted that Shakespeare does not take a romantic view of love. He thinks that it comes from nowhere and so vanishes—a passing fever, childish caprice, dangerous intoxication. *M.N.D.* shows in a magic picture the slight remorse of the guilty and the agony of the victims—the secret tyranny and slavery of this stormy passion, the more sincere the more grievous. We see every form of love fused and associated with incredible art—romantic and elegant, ideal and coquettish, passionate and coarse: the whole enveloped in a magic cloud that hides the basis of cruel observation. Shakespeare believes all because he knows all, and doubts all because he understands all, but he believes in God and man's dignity and virtue, in the soul's power over its destiny, in the wonderful beauty of nature and the devotion of women. *M.N.D.* is the magnificent poem of a dreamer saddened by his experiences of love; but the *Tempest* is the work of a thinker who has seen and judged the revolutions of empires. Ambition and love are at strife: on one side envy, greed of gold and power, sensuality, all that degrades us to the beast—on the other, patient study, innocent love, generosity that forgives. Shakespeare contrasts the two worlds—savage and civilized, pure and corrupted, material and intellectual. His ever-present irony is directed upon politics and the anomalies of the social order. In the first scene a common danger makes all men equal. Caliban and the sailors plot to rule—for here all are ambitious, as in *M.N.D.* all were lovers. These scattered threads do not meet in a common centre by chance. Every kind of political theory and character passes before us, from the philosopher-king to the half-imbecile male represented by Caliban who would stir up revolution to get better drink.

*Hamlet* aims to set forth the mortal uncertainty of the young Prince, his long and bitter meditation on life and death and man's destiny, on virtue and vice. To trouble this dreaming soul his father's spirit has issued from the tomb. Now he lives no longer on earth, but as if suspended over a gulf between two worlds.<sup>1</sup> The murder less pre-occupies his thought than communication with the world of spirits, which sows in his mind the first seeds of madness. Shakespeare gives us but a glimpse of his supernatural beings, yet they are never passive agents; they dominate unfortunate mortals and brood over the whole work.

*Macbeth* is nearest to ancient fatalism; but most of Shakespeare's dramas derive from the literature of Christian Europe between the

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Hartley Coleridge.

twelfth and sixteenth centuries. Christianity sounded the knell of fatalism and proclaimed that the soul was free and all men equal before God. Soon after, empires were plunged in chaos and Italy suffered wave after wave of invasion. Modern Europe began to emerge, and all nations contributed to the common stock of stories and traditions. The habit of regarding the improbable as possible and hazard as the ruler of the world became common to all European peoples. It produced the stories of Boccaccio, *Don Quixote*, even *Gil Blas*, and many of Shakespeare's works such as *Pericles* and *W. Tale*. Reason, absent from the plan, is present in the details of these plays: naïve virtue triumphs over destiny; natural gifts become superior to acquired; nobility of soul overcomes destiny. Since the sixteenth century our horizons have expanded, and we see the history of men and empires no longer as a vast caprice, but the result of deep and hidden causes. But the drama is an actual thing, that springs from the manners of the people, and gives life and society and the existing world. The taste of Shakespeare's age was mixed—a surface of Italian refinement over coarse manners—half-studied antiquity confounded with the traditions of the Middle Ages. The pastoral was another kind of drama where Shakespeare renounced actuality. Political agitations and schisms brought about, in reaction, the fashion of the idyll, and Shakespeare, who found in the taste of his age new resources for his art, turned this to account and seized on the philosophic side: he placed his shepherds in contrast with the troubles of active life. With strange foresight he anticipates the regrets and desires of Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, Rousseau, the young Goethe, and Godwin. He enlarges on the happiness of independence, the delights of solitary reverie, freedom from conventions, universal equality—and, like Rousseau, he shows how these natural tastes are related to virtuous impulses. *Cymbeline* is a masterpiece, and *A.Y.L.* the most original of modern plays. It shows how intimately allied is Shakespeare's genius with nature, and pleasure and virtue have never been closer linked.

Shakespeare was an impartial and inexorable observer, who noted the smallest weakness in the highest virtue, and the lightest shade of virtue in the most criminal soul, but he draws no conclusion. The so-called barbarian has a judgement so high, firm, and pitiless that one might almost call him a cruel observer of the human race. This applies above all to the histories, where his clear-sighted judgement becomes ironic. All sympathies and imaginings are subordinated to a cold and even mocking sagacity which forgives and forgets nothing. He searches for fate in the heart of man, and the more impartial he is the more pain he gives us. His great work is a cold and profound satire on what we are, will be, and have been. His persons know that their only right is power to do wrong and defend their acts; they are great but not moral, brave but not just. The treachery of John, the death of Arthur, the

grief of Constance reveal to us how the great despise natural affection and sacred promises: 'reasons of State' are merely legalized theft and murder. Richard II has no energy either for love or hate, but he is so sensitive to the strokes of ill fortune, so unused to suffering and alien to heroism, that we sympathize with him because we see his mortal sufferings, and we incline to curse the victor. The ancients believed in fate, but Shakespeare, the true philosopher, shows us man fashioning his own destiny.

Shakespeare was no university scholar, but he made himself learned. He read all that the printing-press turned out, till his plays became an encyclopaedia of his age. In *Henry IV* he subtly discriminates the characters of his rogues and contrasts them with the heroic portraits of Hotspur and Glendower. Falstaff is the symbol of intelligent sensuality. He illuminates and embellishes vice; he does not only develop his character, but assumes a part and plays it through life. The Prince dominates the comic and serious parts of the play, and his character is so original, true, and piquant that in no play have comedy and tragedy been so marvellously fused. At his first scene with Falstaff we foreknow that he will eventually dismiss his old friend, and his licentious habits will disappear with the royal purple. *Henry V* is informed with epic majesty: the choruses have a sublime beauty. Success comes from moral causes; for Shakespeare always makes events proceed from mysterious motives hidden in the human heart. When the bishops assure Henry that he has a right to the throne of France, we see Shakespeare's impartial justice. The King is his hero, yet he shows him ready to sacrifice his own life to destroy the lives of thousands, and asking leave of his bishops to murder and pillage. The ten historical plays form a vast epic, where Shakespeare has co-ordinated the greatest lessons of history and vitalized the most vehement political passions. He has painted the melancholy and comic picture of man's perversity and the nothingness of his grandeur. Kings may read in his pages how hard is their vocation, how easy it is for the great to fall into crime, and how tyranny, in thinking to fortify itself, becomes self-destroying.

While the barbarians were invading Europe the law of kindness and forgiveness became established. The Middle Ages had the same double character—on one side ideal belief, on the other coarse raillery. This was the comic spirit that gave us Panurge, Falstaff, Sancho. Symbols of gaiety and terror became intermixed; a society tired with worship and belief began to parody itself. The Fool is the type of medieval gaiety; and Panurge, Falstaff, Sancho represent sensuality and egotism opposed to serious affairs and ideal beliefs. They form a critical chorus against all that makes man rise above material things—such as Platonic love, ambition to conquer, mysticism. Never was comic character drawn with more individual and definite traits than Falstaff. His

disdain for all super-material things makes even more sombre the picture of the civil wars. Cervantes has defined more gracefully the contrast of the sensual life with the spiritual; Shakespeare treats the political side of life. Such characters, including Panurge, represent crowds of ideas, and whole peoples and epochs. Beliefs and kingdoms have changed, but those creations of the spirit survive. It was admirably done, to seize on an idea vaguely present in a century and transform it into an eternally living reality.

The reaction against spiritualism, which had been threatening for two hundred years, broke out in the sixteenth century. With the austerity which had crushed man and condemned him to self-immolation had become mingled the vices which are inseparable from humanity: hypocrisy, avarice, cupidity, tyranny. The peoples of the North, who had accepted most entirely the terrible constraint, reacted furthest, and turned to Protestantism. Luther protested against the celibacy of priests, while Rabelais, though he merely mocked at Rome, prepared the way for the rationalism of *Candide*. Rabelais drew his images from gastronomy and the kitchen, and advised men not to think of their souls and the invisible world. Panurge typifies the clever man without soul, cunning as the fox.<sup>1</sup> Christian Europe is one, and these two principles always at war—on one side love and faith, on the other thought and reason. Ages of faith and doubt succeed each other, and if one predominates exclusively—if the balance is lost—civilization goes to ruin. In the time of Nero the flesh dominated, in the Middle Ages the spirit.

Shakespeare and Cervantes did not sacrifice all to irony, but loved the humanity which they dissected. We cannot believe that Shakespeare represented Hamlet as incapable of action from excess of thought. Like Werther he first dreams and then acts, and the action becomes more violent from delay. Within him are two conflicting forces: passion which goads him to revenge and seethes in him to the point of delirium—and then thought which stirs him to his lowest depths and holds back his arm. He despises life and is ready to punish the murderer, but he is also a philosopher who would solve these problems. Why so many crimes? Whence this evil? Wherefore life? By the highest and subtlest combination ever effected on the stage this thinker is also a hero—this savage is a university student, this man who shrinks from nothing is a mystic. Such is the double Hamlet, and it is possible that Shakespeare's mind was divided between thought and craving for action. He despised his writings and retired prematurely, indifferent either to fame or lack of appreciation. He is content to think and deserve, to meditate on truth and poetry. Those who debate whether he was Catholic or Calvinist should remember there is such a thing as divine reason. Shakespeare lived on this higher plane, neither cold nor

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Mézières on Falstaff.



impartial nor contemptuous. He has profound pity for man, and his irony is that of a god.

He was not concerned to invent facts; the story of *Macbeth* is not his own. Genius is a divine force which dominates and assimilates facts. Shakespeare's aim was to understand, develop, and make his world live. Lady Macbeth is the Teutonic woman, intoxicated with ambition, and capable of any crime to gain the throne. She understands and despises her husband, and uses her impassioned will to overthrow his vague feelings of honour, his scruples, and imagination. She is indeed the *woman*, the great electric force of the moral world. Macbeth is no plaything, and she loves him and wishes him to be great. Thence the interest and terror of the tragic group: the weak being is intoxicated by crime, and the strong yields to the impulse. Shakespeare is sublime when Macbeth's grief and despair overtake his wife.

Translations of Shakespeare fail because of the profound abyss between Latin and Teuton.<sup>1</sup> Shakespeare is the genius of the North personified, and the Latin idiom, sprung from imitation, disciplined by academics, and founded on manners alien to sixteenth-century British civilization, is useless to cope with him. The Latins would reduce to pleasant harmonics his stressed verse, his rhythm more varied than the choirs of our churches, his swift iambics, his gently ironic view of human nature that the Germans call World's Irony, his picture of the soul in all its phases. His thought belonging to that point of the Middle Ages where doubt begins vanishes at the touch of definite language. Literally translated, his pathos becomes trivial, his sublimity absurd pathos. The link between his incoherent thoughts is true passion, unaffected narrative, simple expression of universal ideas and emotions that no Latin tongue can embody. Southern peoples utter their despair with violence; in the West despair turns to irony. We find in Shakespeare this searching playfulness—despair's other shape, more possible than the original. . . .

Chasles's criticism is rather like a mantle thrown loosely over Shakespeare. He uses his subject as a peg on which to hang some ideas which interested him greatly rather than examine it impersonally. If in places the robe clings to the figure and sets off something of its grandeur, it is because the figure itself represents the world and has universal interest. He is right at the outset to thrust aside the lingering beliefs of Voltaire's school that Shakespeare was a monstrous genius, an inspired peasant; but to speak of him as a melancholy absorbed soul is to treat over-confidently matters of conjecture. The writer who summarizes *M.N.D.* as the magnificent poem of a dreamer saddened by his experiences of love cannot be a true Shakespearean; nor do we learn much about the *W. Tale* from his impression of its origin. On

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Barette.

the other hand, there are certain periods of history that never fail to interest, and one of these is the conclusion of the Middle Ages. To connect Shakespeare, however loosely, with this sombre time is to command our attention; and he does this by explaining the philosophy of Rabelais, and making Falstaff one of a critical chorus with Panurge and Sancho. The book, therefore, is suggestive rather than informing, interesting more by the questions raised than those solved. We are used to associate Shakespeare with the Renaissance, but Chasles goes a step further in directing a ray of light on a certain dark expanse of the soul's pre-Renaissance life and conjecturing how it may have affected Shakespeare's thought. His best criticism of a single play is *Hamlet*, where his historical knowledge serves exactly his aesthetic sense.

## II

GUIZOT<sup>1</sup> insists on the popular character of the drama, and says it is the dramatist's duty to awaken sluggish imaginations and faculties dulled by work and monotony. The drama should extend and ennoble the moral life of the people and reveal in them innate but unsuspected faculties. Only when the soul rises above personal matters can it develop; therefore religion has always been the base of the drama. The danger is that when drama rises from the people to the classes above it loses its primitive appeal. It was the happy fate of Greece that the whole nation developed in harmony with art and letters. There is less moral equality in modern nations, but the reign of Elizabeth was one of those epochs when force gives way to ideas, and nations find a new joy in intellectual festivals. Exhausted by civil wars, England demanded order and peace, and there was a rebirth of civilization. Roman constraint was abolished, Puritanism as yet lay low, and the time favoured original production. In spite of despotism liberty was a fact in England.

Unlike Gaul, Great Britain was not deeply and universally stamped by Latin civilization. Saxons, Angles, Danes, Normans had a common origin and like habits. A new, energetic, and characteristic civilization developed in England, determining its politics and literature. A great career opened for minstrels who recalled national events and heroes, such as Alfred or Cœur-de-Lion. This popular poetry tended to unite classes which feudal institutions had kept distinct. The minstrels also played their part in country games and fêtes; they celebrated the traditions of the country—Robin Hood, Percy, and Douglas. The drama naturally arose among a people so disposed; its origin was the Mysteries; and the clergy, who were in touch with the taste of the people, encouraged their liking for plays. They competed with the travelling players, but never departed from the traditional poetic taste formed by the minstrels.

<sup>1</sup> *Sh. et son Temps*, 1852.

Even before Shakespeare the theatre was enormously popular among all classes. Insipid or vulgar productions will not long satisfy a universal taste. Great efforts will be made, till the time is ripe for the man of genius: yet we know not how Shakespeare became aware of his mission. He first worked at retouching the plays of others, and no doubt revealed himself in an occasional brilliant stroke. In his first poem he ignored mythological resources and made Venus only a brilliant courtesan. The verse of *Lucrece*, less brilliant but more emphatic, shows budding dramatic power. *Titus* is utterly unlike Shakespeare; and the only scene in *Pericles* that has his force and truth in painting natural feelings is where Pericles finds Marina. The Talbot scene in *1 Henry VI* is admirable and has the print of his style; and it is probable that he revised carefully Parts II and III. His first original work was a comedy; because comedy always springs from observation of the real world, and is closer linked than tragedy to external events. The Greeks did not mingle tragedy and comedy, because life was simpler. National danger or civil war affected man's outer life without troubling his imagination. Modern nations are composed not of free men and slaves, but a mixture of diverse classes always in a state of chaos. The Mysteries introduced side by side emotions of terror, religious tendency, and buffoonery. Thus in the cradle of dramatic poetry an alliance was formed between tragedy and comedy. In France the alliance was soon broken, and there was return to tragedy and comedy on classical lines; while England followed the irregular course of civilization. Popular taste drove tragedy into regions of horror; and the clergy's influence, which purified comedy of excessive immorality, also took from it the true comic spirit of sustained and malicious gaiety. Art accepted life unclassified, and comedy became fantastic and romantic, the home of amusing unrealities.

Everything in Shakespeare's tragedies is to be found also in his comedies, but faintly traced. In the tragedies it is deeply questioned, rich in consequences, and strongly linked with cause and effect. Angelo is more criminal than Macbeth, but the crimes of Macbeth and Richard III produce a tragic impression because they are real and become incorporated with the criminals. Angelo's crime is a vague abstraction, attached to him like a label, that he may commit an action to produce a situation whence certain effects may be drawn. Leontes' jealousy ceases as soon as the action reaches the point to produce a new situation; and Iachimo's conduct is really as bad as Iago's. Throughout the comedies characters are as little tenacious as passions—and resolutions are as mobile as characters. Expect neither reality, consequences, nor profound study of man and society. Shakespeare's object was to interest by development of situations, and amuse by variety of pictures. No one else has so enriched this frivolous and bizarre comedy, or informed the absurdities of romance with the

divine charm of poetry. Five comedies are free from this romantic taste. In the *Tempest* supernatural power disposes all events and leaves the persons free in the magic atmosphere, with their real impressions and ideas. The *Wives* is based on real customs. *Timon* partakes of grand comedy because the ridiculous springs from the serious; but many of its scenes are more sad than true. The idea of *T. and C.* is more comic than its execution: to flatter Ajax and force Achilles to help through jealousy. An incident of the *Merchant* has led Shakespeare to the confines of tragedy; he has suddenly recognized his province and re-entered the real world where comic and tragic meet, and, painted with equal truth, produce by neighbourhood a more powerful effect. The exactness of the law turns on Shylock, and when he feels the danger and absurdity of his position, emotion and mockery simultaneously arise in the spectators: strange proof of Shakespeare's general disposition. He has treated the romantic scenes without comedy or even gaiety; and true comedy is only found in the tragic Shylock scenes.

Shakespeare's works should be divided not into comic and tragic, but real and fantastic—romance and the world. His histories precede his tragedies, and he only slowly disengaged himself from the taste of his century. Always careful to note the artistic progress of his audience, he never composed a tragedy before some other poet had tested, with the same subject, the public disposition. He was pre-eminently tragic; and only *Richard III* is equal to the tragedies, because it is constructed on the same lines. Events are grouped round one man and help to illuminate him; while the other kings only play a part, sometimes a small one, in the picture of contemporary events. Shakespeare was interested in men, not events; he does not ask of men what they have done, but how they are made. The histories are conceived otherwise than the tragedies—on a national more than dramatic plan—to some extent written beforehand by events known in their details and already in possession of the stage. The subjects could not be subdued to the unity of an individual which Shakespeare required. Kings have to appear in the world's scenes independently of their natures; and Shakespeare could not make their characters the pivot of events. The detached scenes and events of the histories fill the action rather than propel it. The problem of man's power against destiny is what preoccupies Shakespeare's dramatic genius. Richard III wishes to give the lie to fate which seems to have marked him for contempt. He achieves his aim, fulfils his ambition, and is engulfed at the given moment by inflexible destiny. Macbeth, Othello, Coriolanus draw on themselves the events which crush them. Brutus dies from Caesar's death; and no one less wished to kill Caesar. He made a free choice, and found in himself the severe law to which he sacrificed his ease: and with him died the liberty that he wished to save. Above man's terrible play with

destiny hovers his independent moral existence, exempt from the hazards of battle. There is no conflict between duties, and yet—admirable truth of representation!—in these complete and positive actions we see all the inconsequences and strange mixtures of human nature. In *Macbeth* virtue exists by the side of crime. The position of Hamlet's mother is that of a shameless and guilty woman; yet her soul is that of one who might have found happiness in duty. But one truth Shakespeare draws from himself, without which his external truths would not move us: the feeling they excite in himself—the mysterious link which binds us to the living world. Without the anger that a crime inspires, whence the revelation that it is odious? No one has united this double seeing and feeling character like Shakespeare. He lacked art because the thoughts that swarmed in his soul overpowered the dramatic situation. His vision was so extended and his imagination so rapid that he would seize upon a thousand remote likenesses and brusquely pass from one to another. Thence he deceives with an appearance of laboured research, whereas he was really spontaneous.

Unity of impression is the first secret of dramatic art—and Shakespeare attained it, but not through the classic unities. The mobility of our imagination, the variety of our interests, our inconstant longings have given to time, and to places, a power which the poet who wishes to use men's affections to excite sympathy cannot disregard. A person can change in six months, and the thread of identity is snapped. Hence the unities of time and place—but the difficulty is not invincible. Place a person within sight of the object he desires, and in his eagerness to attain it he will not think of measuring the intervening space. Between the fixing of the assault at arms by Laertes and the event, it matters little if two hours or a week pass. The chain of impressions has not been broken; the situation of the characters is unaltered; their projects are the same: and so epochs can be brought near each other by unity of impression. When Macbeth orders Banquo's murder that of Duncan is still present to us, and seems but yesterday. Unity of impression is the end, and other unities merely the means. By this means Shakespeare, from the outset, seizes upon our thoughts, and thence upon space. In the histories he tries to attain it or disguise its absence; in the tragedies he disregards time—in the histories he hides its passage with every artifice. All helps to prove that he sacrificed everything to the great dramatic idea of unity of impression. *Macbeth* most illustrates his care in overcoming difficulties and reforming in the spectator's soul the chain of time and place. While the army is on the way he concentrates our imagination on Macbeth: with him we prepare for the approach of the troops, and we do not think of measuring the time of their march. We see Richard set off for John of Gaunt's castle, and then we become preoccupied with John of Gaunt, and so expect Richard, regardless of the time employed in his journey.

*R. and J.* makes us see the difference between Shakespeare and the Italian poets. He excelled, not as they did, in subtleties, but by insight into natural feelings. *Hamlet* is the unique revelation of the inner state of a great soul: but never has there been such intemperate outpouring of ideas without selection. The source of Hamlet's melancholy is his moral sickness, far more than his griefs and dangers. Next to moral beauty is dramatic effect—and the two chief conditions are fulfilled, of unity in variety, and a single dominant impression. This impression is diversified according to the character, turn of mind, and condition of the various people in whom it appears. Death is over all—and all, even the Grave-diggers, are occupied with death. The soul is stirred to its ultimate depths, while the imagination and senses are whirled hither and thither in a continuous external movement. The same dominant idea confutes the reproach against *Lear* of having a double action. Man is at strife with misfortune, the action of which is modified by different characters. The celestial form of Cordelia, half invisible, broods above the play which she fills with her presence, though she scarcely appears. Edgar develops gradually into a man. Kent has foreseen all, and marches straight to his goal, urged by force of will. *Lear* cannot believe what he sees, and his reason fails. Gloucester succumbs to misery, and then to joy. Macbeth has imperious passions without reasoning to guide or control them. He is like a tree without roots that the lightest wind overthrows. His tragic grandeur is therefore more in destiny than character. Had circumstances placed him further from the throne he would have remained virtuous—but his would have been an anxious virtue, the fruit of circumstance. Now his crime is an agony to him because it was forced by circumstance: it proceeded not from the depths of his nature, yet it absorbs him. Lady Macbeth is truly a woman in that she does not see far or widely, but only one part of one idea to which she surrenders herself with her whole nature.<sup>1</sup> She sees in Duncan's death only the pleasure of becoming queen; her courage is easy because she perceives no obstacle. She did not even foresee the effect on herself of Duncan's corpse.

We must compare Shakespeare to nature or the world, not one play with another. The basis of *J.C.* is the character of Brutus, but the subject is the power and death of Caesar. Dread of his power and need to be delivered from it fill the first half of the play: his memory and the consequences of his death fill the second. Shakespeare only interests us in the event by associating it with Brutus; and he only presents Brutus in association with the event. Hotspur may be more original, because the grandeur of characters of the Middle Ages is filled with individuality: that of ancient characters is founded on certain general principles, which only leaves between individuals differences of height

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Stopford Brooke and Montégut.

to which they attain. Cassius has been called stronger-willed and keener-sighted, but Shakespeare's admirable art consists in retaining superiority for his chief character even if he is at fault.

Othello, Cassio, Iago, Desdemona are living and distinct human beings, drawn into a common situation, carried away by the same event, but each contributing to the general effect by the ideas, feelings, passions, acts which proceed from individuality. Shakespeare has created beings capable of feeling and expressing all that a given act can make human nature yield. The situation is that Othello, a jealous, blinded husband, is goaded to murder—but the character goes far beyond. Cassio does not exist only to be the object of Othello's jealousy; nor do the existences of Desdemona, Emilia, Bianca vanish with the situation. The characters of Voltaire's *Zaire* do not reveal, by means of an incident in their lives, the particular traits of their nature and the impression of their whole existence; they are vague and general beings who momentarily personify love, jealousy, misfortune, and interest less for themselves than because they represent for a day a certain portion of feelings and destinies possible to human nature. In his interview with Brabantio Othello speaks less than fifteen lines, and Desdemona speaks less than twenty before the Senate: yet from that moment they live. Suppress the rest of the play, but you will never efface the impression of Othello and Desdemona: and yet how complex, how full of contrasts and fine shades are these characters! Othello is both savage and civilized man—but civilized by war only—by his courage and self-possession developed by the habit of danger. Desdemona has modesty, tenderness, submission—or rather, it is these qualities that possess her. If Iago does ill for the sake of ill, why give him interested human motives? They destroy the fantastic element—since the Devil has neither malice nor anger, but is disinterested, and does evil because evil is evil. He is represented as an accomplished scoundrel, yet all his projects miscarry, and his devices are most clumsy. How can Cassio, who sailed with Othello, have betrayed Desdemona between Venice and Cyprus? Shakespeare succeeds because improbabilities and absurdities vanish before the liveliness of his first conception.

In *John* Shakespeare did not closely follow history, but in the French scenes invented much to justify the boastfulness of the most cowardly and insolent of princes. Otherwise the action and the facts give us glimpses of this character into which Shakespeare did not dare penetrate, where he could not penetrate without disgust; but as neither character nor halting manner of painting it could be dramatically effective, Shakespeare transferred the interest to Arthur and Falconbridge. On the whole, the play is weakened through want of a uniting idea—the only idea of the kind being hatred of foreign rule overcoming hatred of a tyrannical usurper; a plan too vast for a drama, and not to be reconciled with the reserve maintained with John's character.

*Richard II* does not present a very dramatic spectacle, nor one to accomplish that noble object of art—the exaltation of our feelings and faculties. Pity is often lacking to indignation, and respect to pity. Richard has caused his own fall, but it would be easy to convict the opposing party of many crimes. Shakespeare, however, presents nature as it is and the times as they are: and here he finds only characters achieving exploits that do them no honour, and using treachery as a means. York, ardently serving the man in power, is terribly true. Richard, who has not a friend, must be made interesting from his own resources; and he is one of Shakespeare's profoundest conceptions. He believes in divine right, and is lost when this fails. Then he develops the courage of one surprised into a kind of exaltation by misfortune. By contemplating it he escapes from despair and rises to truth: but it is a sterile, calm, and inactive courage. Although characters like Hotspur, Glendower, Douglas are worthy of tragedy, they are comically shown in *Henry IV*. Even if Shakespeare had not been the court-poet, neither art nor reality would have allowed him to degrade such a person as Henry V. Falstaff is meant only to amuse us, and distract the Prince. The latter is the true hero of the second part, and the dying Henry IV only prepares the way for his son's reign. The comic scenes of Part II are inferior, as Falstaff, less linked to the Prince, appears in his true nature, associated with foolish and wretched persons. The first four acts of *Henry V* are full of events and dramatically effective: the characters, if little developed, are well drawn and sustained.

Few scenes in *Henry VI* reveal the master's touch. The plays lack the unity of impression of his best works, and they also lack his defects of far-fetched expression. In Part II we find no effort to unite scenes separated by years. A single idea dominates *Richard III*: just punishment for the crimes of the civil war. Margaret corresponds with the Witches in *Macbeth*; but while Macbeth is the terrifying image of the power of the Enemy over man, Richard, a more direct agent, jousts with him rather than obeys him, and in this terrible play of hellish forces divine justice only works occasionally, till at the end it bursts in full force upon the head of the insolent criminal. Macbeth plunges into blood, but is finally disillusioned and exhausted by a way of life foreign to his nature: Richard, less deep in feeling, but with greater intellect, had found in crime the pleasure of working his faculties and overmastering others. Those he has divided unite, and though too strong for each singly, he now meets an obstacle that shatters him, and dies indignant that he can conquer no more. *Henry VIII* confirms our opinion that Shakespeare's impartial spirit left him when he treated English history—that he judged persons and things like John Bull . . .

France has now definitely broken with the Voltairean tradition, and the object of her foremost critics is to understand the peculiar nature



of Shakespeare's greatness. They no longer bring forward ready-made theories, and rebuke him as a nonconformist. As historical critic no one could be more helpful than Guizot. He traces the alliance of tragedy and comedy to the Mysteries, and explains why France returned to the classic ideal, but unlatinized England followed out her irregular civilization, and used unclassified life in her art. So far the learned and wide-visioned historian does us good service, but in treating the plays he is a less sure guide. His general conclusions are that Shakespeare is greatest of poets and dramatists, but less than the greatest artist, and that the tragedies surpass the histories and comedies. We do not dispute these—but the last impression of Guizot is an intellectual rather than aesthetic force. Except once or twice he does not stimulate the imagination, because the steel-alloy of intellect over-hardens the aesthetic gold, e.g. his characters of Angelo, Leontes, Iago. That at times his whole being is absorbed by his subject we see from the statement that in Shakespeare man has an independent moral existence above destiny—but his great preoccupation is the semi-intellectual one of unity of impression. The result is that we think of the drama as an elaborate scheme, where controlled emotion has no more than its due place—and of Shakespeare as the grand artificer, but not one whose chariot wheels were apt to leave the earthly track for heaven. He compares seriously Richard III and Macbeth, and sees in Richard II one of Shakespeare's profoundest conceptions. He says that Macbeth's tragic grandeur was more in destiny than character, and Lady Macbeth's courage easy because she perceived no obstacle. On the other hand, it forces him to see by contrast how the characters of *Othello* live with an independent life despite the close-framed plot.

Perhaps we may call Guizot's critical method inductive, but in the end he brings much of Shakespeare's greatness home. There dwells in his inner mind a greater Shakespeare than came forth to satisfy the taste of the Elizabethan public. We must also admit ourselves influenced by some striking sentences in Sainte-Beuve's essay. Guizot, he says, is astonished at nothing; explains everything, and gives a reason. He continues, one who knew him well used to say, 'What he has only learnt this morning he seems to have known from all eternity'.<sup>1</sup>

### III

ALFRED MÉZIÈRES<sup>2</sup> remarks at the outset that critics have used Shakespeare's works to express preconceived ideas in philosophy or aesthetics. The Germans have made an obscure and enigmatic Shakespeare in their own image, but they are now beginning to drop their theories and approach the French method since the beginning of the

<sup>1</sup> *Causeries*, i. 322-3.

<sup>2</sup> *Sh. ses Œuvres et ses Critiques*, 1860.

century. He then proceeds to examine the plays, and remarks that *Henry VI* is sustained by its subject. History became a fruitful source for English dramatic poetry; it provided the elements of popular success and imposed a limit on fancy. Part I is haphazard, distinguished only by a blind and intolerant patriotism.<sup>1</sup> Shakespeare accepted the popular prejudice against Joan of Arc, yet shows traces of involuntary sympathy. He sees personified in her a people armed in the cause of independence. Parts II and III are recasts of Greene's plays, but we see Shakespeare's hand in the development of the characters. Only he understood that a weak being like Henry, whom chance had placed upon the throne, could be made interesting. Both he and Marlowe's Edward II interest us as men, not kings. They were not made to be kings, and their troubles arise less from their faults than because they cannot cope with circumstances. But unlike Marlowe Shakespeare seizes all the shades of the soul by delicate analysis.

We must beware of reading personal history into plays such as the *Errors* and *Shrew*, but it may be said that Shakespeare in his early works was preoccupied with marriage. All depends on choice, he seems to say: marriage is good or bad as you choose well or ill. So far in the harsh and violent tone of his plays he is little above his predecessors; he emphasises one side rather than conceives well the whole. At that time the English admired blindly everything Italian, and the result was strange contrast of a young and coarse national literature and one that was decadent. Shakespeare's Sonnets show Italian influence, but the mental discipline enabled him to throw off the rude popular language. In the Sonnets he abjures mysticism and expresses burning love and friendship. We see that in his youth he loved, suffered, and owed his chief consolations to friendship. Because he felt his position as actor inferior, his gratitude merged into adoration for Southampton.

In comedy he cared little for intrigue and all for character, with the result that when he cannot refer events to character he makes use of bizarre combinations and unlikely means, especially in the early comedies. He wrote for the England of his time, and retained national prejudices, but he gets to the heart of his characters and discovers feelings that no external circumstances alter. Such a character as Molière's rascal valet, who lives on others, is unknown in his pages. He recognizes and honours man's dignity in the humblest condition. He never forgets the moral point of view, and respects all social and natural bonds. The father of a family always acts with the right intentions, is honoured, and never made ridiculous. Love triumphs, but after trials, and does not weaken the father's authority. The husband is not sacrificed to the lover—but it is the seducer who is made ridiculous. Love is the basis of his comedies, unlike Molière, and his

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Guizot.

loves are not the uniform French, Italian, and Spanish type, but have distinct physiognomies. Proteus teaches that inconstancy can beget crime—Bertram shows no courtesy to women—Bassanio does not sigh for his beloved, but seeks to win her hand—the fearless Orlando is a timid lover. Yet the conclusion is the same: love's irresistible force and sure victory. Women are treated with particular kindness, drawn delicately without men's faults, and with virtue, reason, strength, grace. The unhappy are those without love, or who attach themselves to an unfaithful or insensible lover. Helena pities not herself but Bertram. Shakespeare represents her as no puppet of fortune, but the artificer of her own destiny. One can forget her adventures and remember her as the type of virtuous and brave love struggling with misfortune. Women's superiority to men, and the influence of love on both, seemed to dominate Shakespeare at this time.

Rosalind puts humour into love, yet loves as tenderly as Helena. The same goal is reached by a different route; and we see how, starting from contrary points, they meet in the higher regions of passion, thanks to the law of nature. To make a woman who is in love play the part of love's critic, and unite scepticism for a feeling with deep experience of it, is a true and piquant idea. The insensibility of Beatrice only makes the triumph of passion over reason more notable. The thoughts of both are unexpected, original, and piquantly expressed. A mixture of good sense, paradox, and, above all, irony results in a specially English language. They mock at human folly, which they know to the full, and at themselves—but they do separate truth from falsehood. This crowd of detached thoughts makes Shakespeare's theatre the greatest modern repository of general ideas. The characters have reflected on all things, and nothing takes them at a disadvantage. Jaques belongs to the third period, and foreshadows the melancholy tragic characters; but otherwise, in the comedies, irony stays at a fine and subtle mockery, and never reaches sadness or anger.

It is a curious problem whether Shakespeare uses his characters to express his own thoughts. We think he does at times, through his humorists. Biron, Benedict, Hamlet, Prospero represent different periods: but is he only a mocker? Has he no share in the tremendous passions of the tragedies? His variety is infinite; he has described every state of the soul, every kind of passion and character. His skill is not only for mockery, but confidence, *naïveté*, simplicity, credulity. His theatre is made up of contrasts: passion and indifference appear side by side—buffoonery mixes with tragedy. If he speaks directly, it is probably now and then in a part which reflects the present state of his soul, never throughout a whole part—or he would not have been identified with so many opposite characters.

The *Merchant* is almost a chapter of history, it opens to us the inner state of the Middle Ages. We see the miseries of riches, and the

uncertainty of fortune; also the antagonism of races and oppression of the weak, and the bitterness left by persecution. Shylock's love of money has not stifled his feeling for man's dignity; riches do not console him for insult. He is impartially presented, neither attractive nor odious. Unlike Marlowe's Jew we are shown the motives that goaded to cruelty a peaceful business man. Those who disregarded human dignity are responsible for his conduct.

If one wishes to find Shakespeare's character in his works it is best to search the histories. Typical Englishman, believing everything in his country to be the best, his impartiality disposed him to do justice to strangers. There may be errors and anachronisms, but he knows enough to seize upon the general meaning of events and understand the special character of an epoch. The *Henry VI* plays and *Richard III* reveal for the first time the full power of his tragic genius. His youth is over, he no longer deals with private life, but shows humanity at strife with political events. He deducts the influence of passions from facts that are past; and behind kings and nobles, as background, he shows us the people dependent on their governors for happiness or misery. History widened observation but contracted imagination; yet it confined him to realities and corrected excessive abundance.<sup>1</sup> He cannot alter facts, as in the plays he took from Italian novels—and so he concentrates less on facts than the relation of facts to passions. His principle is search amidst men's feelings for the causes of actions, and explain the chances of history by the development of characters. He always trusts the moral axiom that man rather makes than submits to destiny. But political as well as moral considerations enter into the historical plays. A statesman must not be judged by private standards—and therefore Shakespeare is severe to weak princes: Richard II and Henry VI are not innocent.<sup>2</sup> Unlike our tragedians he aims to be real rather than always noble—and to attain truth, recoils at no coarse details. He embraces all Nature, and if he is often sublime like her, he often descends, as she does, to trivialities. Thus we follow history's course—that which carries with it the higher classes, and also the masses. Every action of king or minister ultimately affects the lowest social ranks.

The great lords, prelates, and princes who occupy the foreground have only one common trait—independence of character. The civil wars are struggles between men, not principles. Each wishes to overcome his personal adversary and govern in his turn. Faithful to the spirit of the Moralities, Shakespeare always draws a moral from events. But he admires heroes, and while he studies passion from the moral point of view, he does not neglect the material side—and thus Hotspur is his most brilliant portrait—the complete feudal nobleman, both in follies and heroism. But he is only fitted for battle, not to be a conspirator; and where patience is required and knowledge of men, he

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Dowden.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

only brings scornful pride, ignorance of danger, and wish to make his opinion prevail at all costs. Shakespeare's prelates lead the world more by skill than force; they are subtly and faithfully drawn from history. We see, from Wolsey, that in the retreats of the soul there is one part untouched by external influences, where the delicate sensibilities take refuge. The kings can govern badly either through weakness or wickedness; but John is both cruel and weak. Richard II needs all Shakespeare's art, for there is nothing less tragic than an irresolute character. Richard has no great actions to speak of, and therefore describes his feelings. Shakespeare studies his soul more than his conduct; and as history cannot tell him this, he calls up, by force of imagination, what a prince should be who has failed to keep his crown. He creates the illusion of a portrait, of which we say that it must have been a good likeness, though we have not seen the original. Richard III, by means of hard thinking, has developed the power not only to profit by events, but even to bring about those he desires. But monologue is the habit of a divided rather than a determined soul: and a man does not unveil all his worst thoughts. The contrast even shocks between his brutal assaults and subtle performances. That crime should be punished here on earth is the moral law of English tragedy.

Henry IV plays his part of king nobly, but has lost happiness. By means of his monologue on sleep Shakespeare shows us the depths of human consciousness. He recognizes the nothingness of life, ambition, glory. A meditative and philosophical spirit is strikingly combined with practical ability. Henry V is drawn with marked preference, but his limits are fixed beforehand. He knows himself too well, and reckons on future glory by contrast with the past. To hide deep projects beneath a comic intrigue is a clumsy device. Otherwise, as prince and man, he combines the most opposite qualities of human nature, and he has the habit of meditation. He combines hero, sage, and bourgeois—a spirit opposite to the Middle Ages. Always to be doing—and to do well—such is the law of human activity, the tendency of the Anglo-Saxon race, and Shakespeare's rule of conduct. The Germans admire him because he is like them: he is like a modern German who smokes and drinks beer while he meditates. Many have failed to mix tragic and comic; we therefore decline general principles, but admit that Shakespeare's particular genius succeeded in developing characters by contrasting the two elements. The honour is his own, not that of any system. A cause of Falstaff's success is his *embonpoint*—since people like a joke which they actually see. Man is at once body, soul, and mind; and Falstaff is original because he has only the animal and intellectual parts.<sup>1</sup> Honour, courage, patriotism do not serve material pleasure. In the Prince's choice of such a companion we see mixture of tragic and comic. The Prince likes his epicurean side, and Falstaff's

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Chasles on Panurge.

verve distracts him from anxieties. He has no illusions, and if he is weak enough to live with Falstaff, he does not encourage his vices, but loses no occasion to humiliate him that he may lead him to repent. Shakespeare in the end always punishes the guilty; and Falstaff is only condemned to reform himself: but he cannot live without pleasure. He is exclusively English, not a universal hero like Sancho Panza who needs no explaining. Shakespeare's histories are saturated with poetry, observation, philosophy, imagination—and if every joke had been omitted his genius would not appear less.

Loss of gaiety marks his third, tragic, period: even the comic has a serious basis. An inner emotion, not to be found later in the same degree, animates *R. and J.* But for him the lovers would have been forgotten. He sees more than a moving story; he sees a particular emotion; and therefore continually bursts his dramatic barriers under lyric impulse. The lovers forget external constraints and hearken to the musical voice singing in the depth of their hearts. What Juliet feels is the urge to happiness, and she forgets a maiden's reserve in her naïve impatience. The first movement always decides the lots of passionate natures; and Shakespeare observes this in the deaths of Romeo and Juliet. He is judge as well as painter of passion: most difficult of tasks, to identify oneself with those under its influence and retain the freedom to analyse it coldly. He seems to share their illusions, and then throws the calm glance of the philosopher over all. As in the comedies, Shakespeare recognizes the victorious power of love, stronger than reason. But in obedience to the moral law the lovers pay the penalty of their madness.

Othello may lack the qualities of civilized man, but he has every natural gift. How can jealousy seize on so noble a soul? Remember he has African blood—and violent passions may be suddenly rekindled. Iago even uses against Desdemona, in Othello's eyes, the sacrifices she has made to marry him. Iago loves evil for the sake of evil; he is the genius of evil. None of his schemes miscarry, and perhaps it is a fault against probability that Shakespeare gives him this supernatural power. Among so many people interested in knowing the truth there is too much credulity. Iago's perversity was not impossible—since Richard III was an historical instance. Besides, Iago was a countryman of Machiavelli; and the Italians of the fifteenth century would have approved his methods and despised Othello. Love affects Desdemona's heart only, and does not stimulate her intellect. Like Romeo and Juliet she has placed passion before duty and abandoned her father. Shakespeare does not condemn passion, but sympathizes with its victims; but he shows where it leads those who, under its spell, have disregarded social and family ties.

*Lear* verges upon horror, but Shakespeare was not writing for our delicate age. It has epic breadth; behind persons we see nations, and

the dramatic limits are extended. The unity is moral rather than literary, and here it is the suffering caused by ingratitude. The chief feeling is pity for insulted old age and royal dignity, and a father's heart broken by his children. Romeo and Juliet and Desdemona have known happiness, but here all is sad from the beginning. The first scene is not unnatural, but, as the caprice of a despotic old man, is the key to the whole play. It is not destiny that prepares Lear's ruin, but himself, in raising up the guilty and proscribing the innocent. Passion blinds him; and, with Shakespeare, passion is always punished. He has misunderstood a father's duties, and excited covetousness in his daughters. After abdicating, he preserves his autocratic character, and he cannot stand misfortune. Ingratitude remains a fixed idea, and his character unifies the play. Only by giving madness a philosophic tinge could Shakespeare accommodate it to the play. The Fool, who asks nothing of the world, does relieve the spectator; and his fidelity emphasizes the ingratitude of Lear's daughters; he fills the place that they should occupy. Goneril and Regan are historical characters, and are not overdrawn. They excite horror, but the energy of their actions interests us.

We admire in *Macbeth*, amid such variety, the unity that results from the development of a unique character. A new and dramatic state of soul is depicted by Shakespeare: how the thought of crime enters and ravages a virtuous soul. Macbeth is not wicked but ambitious; and the Witches reveal him to himself. His crime is punished by loss of peace; and the sight of his agony teaches us the cost of crime. Even his reason suffers, and he takes refuge in illusory security. We see him in the last act a prey to conflicting emotions, unable to take a resolution that might save him. He clings to the Witches' predictions, and then yields to disgust of life. Lady Macbeth's violent feelings were due to a passing exaltation; she had not foreseen one crime would lead to others. She has not the calm energy of great criminals, but sudden impulses of ambition and boldness. Every tragedy of Shakespeare's has a dominating passion, whence he draws the moral: and here it is ambition. He succeeded in his use of the marvellous because he combined epic and dramatic. While retaining the dramatist's part of realistic observer, he yet gazes with the eyes of imagination into the shadows of the unseen world. The Witches do not act on Macbeth against his will; they are not ancient fate, but the destiny we carve for ourselves. But Shakespeare makes them concrete; he gives them all the outer signs of life; and herein lies the originality. They play the part that dreams play in our classic tragedies; but they have the superiority of action over narrative.

Shakespeare uses Hamlet to express his own philosophy and ironical ideas. His heroes often overstep dramatic limits and live an independent life; and we see this most in Hamlet. His sickness is due to more than

circumstances; he is one of those unhappy beings whose melancholy temperament and piercing intellect make them more sensitive to evil than to good. Circumstances count less than temperament: if Werther had never met Charlotte he would still have killed himself.<sup>1</sup> His father's ghost does not decide Hamlet's fate, but gives a new direction to his thought. He suffered unconsciously before, but now he knows the cause of his suffering. At first he hesitates to act on the word of an apparition, and, after the play, he thinks of the responsibility and possible remorse. Unlike those heroes of Shakespeare's who create situations, he submits to them without resistance. Everything in the last scene is unexpected. We may assume the play reflects Shakespeare's self—or why would he have created such an undramatic character? If the instructions to the players are his own, why not the philosophic ideas? But Shakespeare is too wide to be confined wholly within a single character; and there are two parts in Hamlet: one which harmonizes with Shakespeare's ideas, and the other which corresponds with the situation which the struggle between character and destiny makes for the person. Hamlet belongs to the modern world; he is a dreamer of our time placed in the modern world where only action is of use. Shakespeare thrice recast *Hamlet*, and what he added seems the expression of his inmost thoughts.

Timon pierces the veil that hides individual selfishness: and there stops all likeness with Shakespeare. Shakespeare had neither blind optimism nor fury; he is neither as indulgent nor as severe for his fellow men. Timon keeps no mean, and is therefore far from Shakespeare, who places true happiness and merit in the balance of all the soul's faculties. Timon really loves no one, because he loves the whole world. He is a waster without insight, who passes from one extreme to another.

Shakespeare applies to ancient history the same political knowledge as to English. He explains causes rather than informs himself rightly about every detail. Characters become the key to events—if we make 'character' comprehend the spirit of a nation. In all history there is one important person with a collective name and marked traits—the people. As in the English plays, Shakespeare gives to the people a special physiognomy that varies with time, and a definite part. From the chaos of its feelings his art disengages a kind of unity, and expresses it dramatically.<sup>2</sup> He does not justify but explains the character of Coriolanus. His virile education has not accustomed him to tenderness. From his courage came pride; and his modesty was a form of pride: he thought himself above opinion. He deserves death for fighting against his country, and therefore does not rouse our pity.

The people of *J.C.* are like a faithful mirror of the feelings that convulse Rome. The conspirators stand out against a background of

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Montégut and Stapfer.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Creizenach.



popular impressions. There is an apparent lack of unity, but Shakespeare, in historical plays, embraced wide spaces of time and followed out the development of a character rather than a single action. Caesar from his grave affects his country's destinies and the fortunes of his enemies. Shakespeare excels in treating the facts supplied by Plutarch not like a game of chance, but the inevitable consequences of human passions. He has invented nothing, he has not interfered with facts, but he has made Brutus, his hero, so true and living that the tragic events seem the result of his qualities or defects. We never suspect he is closed within a circle of necessity, so free he appears, so much master of his destiny. We know the course of the play, yet he seems to remake it under our eyes. He has grown popular by his patriotism and pure morals; and this popularity compels him to act. He shows no political genius; it is public opinion that makes him chief conspirator. He is a man of gentle habits, humane like a Greek, averse to action. He is akin to Hamlet, yet he has the stuff of the man of action. Cassius, true type of conspirator, intervenes and forces him to act. It is the old Roman education that decides—patriotism before all, country before private affections. But he essays to compromise between the moral law and the law of public security, to become a murderer to satisfy the second, but only to commit one murder so as not to depart too far from the first. He stays at a half-measure and lets Antony escape. He leads the flight to Asia when the matter should have been decided in Rome. The fault of the play is that Shakespeare departs from historic truth to make the assassin superior to his victim. He was not obliged to belittle Caesar, but for once he lacked impartiality. He should have emphasized Caesar's magnanimity and lack of suspicion after he had been warned. The punishment of the conspirators satisfies the moral law; behind every event we see the man who provoked it and must take the responsibility.

Antony wishes to forget Rome and found an Eastern empire. Alexandria seems to him more fitted to be the centre of the world. Ships from all parts of the Mediterranean bring the products of Europe, Asia, and Africa to its harbour; and it is at Alexandria that Greek art and learning have taken refuge. But the bravest soldiers came from the West; and the Roman citizens resented Antony's Oriental leanings. He assumed the title of king, and masqueraded as Osiris, with Cleopatra as Isis. His Oriental levies fail against the picked Western troops; and we see, both in Plutarch and Shakespeare, the effect of Antony's passion on his genius. History hides a meaning that Shakespeare disengages: he explains facts by the play of feelings. Perhaps Antony does not care enough for public opinion to hide his weaknesses. Above all, he has a manly sensitiveness, a generous tenderness for his friends. His generosity in death, when he does not reproach Cleopatra, expiates many of his faults. We are also inclined to judge leniently a

hero who inspires to the very end so strong an attachment in all about him. If he dies wretchedly it is because he is uplifted by no moral principle; he neither attempts to develop the good in himself nor to make his people happy: he floats on the tide of passion. His faculties decay; he fails at Actium because his soul can no longer guide him. Octavius lacks his military virtues, but is master of himself. He did not attract, but was honoured after his death, because, unlike Antony, he had vowed his life to a great ideal: to unite the hostile elements of the Roman Empire, and give peace to the world. The play is loosely constructed, and shows signs of Shakespeare's intellectual fatigue; but, as ever, the moral standpoint remains: where one commands his passions and the other is passion's slave, the first is fittest to rule.

Isabella (*M. for M.*) does not touch us, because she seems untouched herself; but she aspires to an exalted religious ideal and a superhuman purity. She places duty before all, and this gives her character a kind of dryness, increased by the cloister's seclusion, and the desire for sacrifice developed by the habit of meditating on eternity. Yet she retains sensibility, and it is this that wins upon Angelo. At the bottom of all Angelo's actions we find Puritan pride and insensibility, which prevent virtue taking root in his heart, and encourage evil suggestions when once the thought of evil has entered. Because he wished to be more than man he has fallen below man. In Shakespeare's eyes goodness and sweetness make up virtue more than strength. The good Duke is the foil to Angelo: his nature is founded on simplicity, love of truth, goodness, tolerance. Power has made him neither proud nor dry like Angelo. Kindness inclines him to be weak—but fear to punish is not the only cause of his retirement. He wishes to learn whether unyielding power is better than moderate power, whether rigour gets better results than indulgence. Angelo deserves death: but who is innocent, according to the rules of strict justice? The Puritan is inexorable, but the Christian forgives. The conclusion is the same as the *Merchant*—that mercy is above rigour—and the thought comes from Shakespeare's heart. Moral elevation and wealth of philosophical ideas make the play beautiful. The plot is clumsy and improbable, and the comic element excites only disgust.

The action of *Cymbeline* is defective, but it has admirable scenes. Imogen alone gives unity to the play by the unity of her feelings. Besides sense of duty, she has courage, intellect, sensibility, which stamp her with ideal perfection. Shakespeare multiplies her difficulties to bring out her virtues. Trouble comes to Posthumus when he interferes with family rights. The end is not tragedy, as with Juliet and Desdemona, because Imogen has not yielded wholly to passion but has chosen reasonably. Yet, in accordance with Shakespeare's poetic moral system, she must expiate by suffering even just resistance to her father's authority. The basis of her character is truth to her plighted

faith. The dramatic contrast is between her happy dreams and the terrible reality. Unlike Boccaccio's heroine she craves death as a boon: and this trait alone shows the superiority of love as conceived by the Northern poet. She does not wish to live, because life is divided tenderness—but duty prevents suicide. To be virtuous, yet suspected by one for whom she has sacrificed all, to be far away and unable to justify herself, to wish for death in vain—such is the state of her soul. Shakespeare has never explored so far a woman's character, nor brought within one focus so much sensibility, courage, and generosity. Her brothers interest only when they speak of her; and their naïve admiration bring home to us her charm. Fidelity is the virtue of primitive times; and Shakespeare, in his more epic plays, rediscovers, by the intuition of genius, the same thoughts as Homer. He disengages from barbarous customs man's noblest feelings.

If Shakespeare ignores the beauty of *T. and C.* to seize the ridiculous side, we must remember that there was an earlier play. *Troilus* was a heroic type, *Cressida* and *Pandarus* were comic types; therefore Shakespeare already found a tone of ridicule in the old books. *Pandarus* is a buffoon like *Falstaff*, with no aim but pleasure. He takes nothing seriously, not even love—and sees in life only an amusing spectacle, and in the faults of others means of distraction. *Cressida* is far-seeing and prudent; she resists not to defend her honour but conserve her lovers. The vivid portrait shows the personal experience of the *Sonnets*. *Thersites* has an object inverse to that of a poet: to degrade heroes and exaggerate their faults instead of idealizing them. His envenomed shafts pierce into the coarseness of barbarous customs. We see the great man of the heroic age laid bare with his secret weaknesses. It is unlikely that Shakespeare meant to travesty the *Iliad*, but he had probably read *Chapman*. He has rarely got the spirit, and the serious element does not come from *Homer*. The characters of *Troilus*, *Nestor*, *Ulysses*, *Agamemnon*, *Hector*, either knightly or political, the councils of the Greeks and Trojans, are nearer the medieval romances than *Homer*. If for the heroic and historic basis of the play he omitted the *Iliad*, he would not consult it to ridicule it. No doubt his irony sprang from reading the pompous narratives of the story-tellers who have travestied the *Iliad*.

The *W. Tale* has no philosophy, but its object is to amuse. It is a general medley of antiquity and chivalry, paganism and Christianity—the work of genius, but genius in repose. *Leontes'* jealousy springs from fantasy, but we forget its unreality when it produces such consequences. Shakespeare's last works show the serenity of a great mind mellowing with time and avoiding extreme emotions. *Perdita's* amiable speeches prove nothing in favour of the country life, because the reason why she expresses herself with so much natural refinement is that she belongs already to the highest class. The only play to be

compared with the *Tempest* is *M.N.D.*—a spiritual and poetic reverie artistically reconciled with popular beliefs. Oberon and Titania defy analysis; they are as fleeting as our dreams, of which they are the geniuses. They can attain neither the fullness of real life nor the elevation of moral life; neither can reason nor sense of good and evil explain their actions. They quarrel without true motive; they follow no law but fantasy; and this fantasy, with no object but sensation, leads them through all the wonders of nature. The *Tempest*, on the contrary, expresses no caprice of fancy, but obeys the laws of a strict logic and contributes to the morality of the story. There is no blind fate, but all is foreseen and directed by a superior will. Shakespeare observes the unities, and so far from losing anything of his abundant conceptions proves that Aristotle's principles can be reconciled with the freest inspiration of genius. The German critics have said that Caliban, with his brutal appetites, represents the people: but he is simply the primitive man left to himself. If Shakespeare has a philosophical intention it is irony at those who contrast an innocent state of nature with the miseries of civilization. He mockingly dismisses the charge of corrupting the peace of savage races, and believes that Europe's task is to conquer the world. In his patriotic good sense he understands that the brave sailors who plant Great Britain's flag on unknown shores are the best instruments of her power and the noblest representatives of the Anglo-Saxon race. What would have become of America without English colonists? Shakespeare, as Prospero, also satirizes the Utopians; for he accepts men as they are, knowing they are not born good, and does not despair of them, but would correct them by reason and experience. He compels the wicked to search their own hearts, he reveals in them moral sense, and regenerates them by the force of a superior mind. In his tragedies Shakespeare did not forgive the villains; but here we see a nobler, if less tragic, spectacle—a man who holds his enemies in his power, but prefers to show them mercy so that they may repent. He would not leave a crime unpunished, but his object was to touch the soul more than the body of the guilty one.

We identify Shakespeare more or less with his successive heroes—Benedict, Hamlet, Prospero—but Henry V most resembles him. His vivid descriptions of love cannot be due to imagination alone; but, as dramatic poet, he early gained great self-control. He never abandons himself unreservedly to pleasure, and when his lovers are in their heaven, his clear intellect uses good sense or irony to plead the cause of reason against love. We feel that in his crisis of passion he could argue with himself as did the Friar with Romeo; and also, simultaneously with comedies, he wrote histories, where the interest is political. In his tragic period sadness does not exclusively dominate; but we see flashes of gaiety. He is absolutely impersonal; his faculties are in perfect balance; he is never too preoccupied with a thought to exclude

its opposite. Neither Iago, Desdemona, Edmund, Gloster, Cordelia, Falstaff, nor Hotspur express Shakespeare's own thoughts or answer to a particular state of his soul: yet they are not inferior to those whom we do consider as interpreters of his own thoughts.

Apparently irregular, he is an artist. His supposed faults are the result of a dramatic system larger and more adapted to modern social instincts than the classic. He extends his inquiries over the whole world; he assembles in his huge work every possible contrast of life. Like nature he associates the most disparate images; nor do things become so transformed in his mind that they lose their imperfections: on the contrary, he seizes without any illusions on the vulgar side of things, for the sake of truth and completeness. Lear alone would touch us, but he touches us still more by contrast with the wild gaiety of his companion. Other poets see only the fair side of chivalry: Shakespeare knows that vices and absurdities are concealed beneath the brilliant surface—and he opposes Falstaff to Douglas and Hotspur. Thus he passes easily from tragedy to comedy, fruitful as nature that simultaneously produces all types of man. The classic unities are necessarily excluded; one day does not suffice for feelings that require a lifetime to develop.

In ancient tragedy man was not free; but Shakespeare elevates his characters above facts. Even when bound by historical facts he derives the action from human passions. He maintains an absolute law of moral responsibility, and replaces unity of action by unity of character. He studies not one special action, but a whole life: and from this unity comes a strange variety, since man is complex. His characters therefore have an independent life; while Racine only shows us the side of his hero's character that applies to a present situation. Take away the situations, and Shakespeare's characters would still retain their individuality.<sup>1</sup> Othello, Macbeth, Iago are not types of jealousy, ambition, wickedness: but each has a personal jealousy, ambition, perversity. The Latin poets simply incarnate their ideas in a man.

Although Shakespeare follows life he is not realistic: he idealizes by means of poetry. He sees reality like a poet, imaginatively, so that objects become greater. His style creates an ideal atmosphere, and his characters stand out bathed in magic light. Henry IV is the man of affairs on the throne: and how grandly he depicts a king's duties and the sorrows of high place! How noble is Kent's devotion! How pure the friendship of Hamlet and Horatio! They are real, but into their souls has passed that of a poet. They act as men, but think and speak like demigods. The wicked, too, receive ideal life; their careers, as a whole, raise them above common mortals. An ordinary scoundrel could act like Iago or Edmund—but he would not have the genius of evil. The French and Italian classics continued to imitate the simple

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Guizot on *Othello*.

and regular forms and harmonious proportions of the ancients, with little success. The Northern nations made form secondary and searched for thought. Their art is the result of meditation, of the mind turned inward upon itself, or applied to moral questions. Shakespeare ministers to this want; his fundamental idea is individual liberty and responsibility. Nature, he says, is neither tyrannical nor unjust; she lets all men fulfil the destiny to which they are fitted, if they are true to themselves at a crisis: but if she is without anger she is also without pity. He unites in the highest degree two elements usually at war: imagination and reason. The result is the most marvellous genius of modern times. . . .

Mézières has the right type of mind for criticizing Shakespeare—receptive before it becomes active. He is one of those well-balanced critics—and Professor Herford is another—who stand to criticism as Jane Austen to fiction. She brought to the society of Bath or Steventon no novelist's intention, but simply the capacity to be impressed. The result was a thought on which the mind worked and meditated. The thought developed, the fabric of the mind yielded, and opened inward to the unconscious depths—those depths where the humblest is on terms with the most philosophic. Granted this primal virtue of sincerity, the further result depends on the quality of the mind itself; and the first thing to say about Mézières is that he is naturally sensitive to fine shades of emotion. We can recall but three of his sayings that are at all crude: he over-emphasizes Shakespeare's patriotism; he is convinced that Shakespeare resembled Henry V; and he thinks that Henry V humiliated Falstaff to make him repent. Otherwise, like so few of his countrymen, he is not wholly a stranger even in the land of English humour. Above all, he excels in an intellectual-spiritual interpretation of emotion that makes us relive a play in memory and helps to complete our knowledge of a character. He says that Helena pities Bertram, not herself, and that Rosalind puts humour into love, uniting scepticism for a feeling with deep experience of it. To call Shylock a 'peaceful business man' is to remind us that there was such a side to his character. Turning to the histories we find that the civil wars were between men, not principles; that Hotspur must make his opinion prevail at all costs; that in Wolsey's soul there was a shrine shut off from the world; that Richard II creates the illusions of a good portrait. The critique of *R. and J.* is remarkably well expressed, but, contrary to expectation, adds little to our emotional knowledge. Two things stand out in *Lear*: that the King's madness must necessarily have a philosophic tinge; and that Goneril and Regan interest by their energy. Of *Macbeth* and *Hamlet* the most penetrating remarks are that Lady Macbeth was affected by a passing exaltation; and that Hamlet was more sensitive to evil than good. What finally makes Brutus act is the old Roman education; and Antony does not care

enough for public opinion to hide his weaknesses. We will conclude with three selections from the romances: Imogen's brothers interest only when they speak of her; Leontes' jealousy produces such consequences that we forget its unreality; and Caliban is simply the primitive man left to himself.

Emotion, or the language of the heart, translated into the language of the head, made articulate, and not killed in the process—such is the impression we receive from Mézières. So far the critic has depended on intuition; it remains to note the degree of success he attains when, with his impressions, are mingled acquired knowledge or moral considerations. Of the first we commend above all his account of Antony's Eastern empire, where feeling has transmuted historical matter into poetry. Of the second we may cite as instances where morality has quickened his critical power the following: Antony fails at Actium because his soul can no longer guide him—Isabella's desire for sacrifice is developed by the habit of meditating on eternity—the Puritan is inexorable, but the Christian forgives. When he says that Falstaff is only condemned to reform himself, the effect of morality has been to obscure his vision. But on the whole his work plays the part of finishing-school in our knowledge of Shakespearian psychology.

Turning to its outer circles—to his opinion on the unities, on the larger modern drama, on the ideal and real, on the distinctions between the Northern and Southern genius, and the characters of Shakespeare and Racine—we see that the influence of Voltaire is no more, and Shakespeare is equally honoured in France and England. Facts precede theories, and critics argue backwards from the facts. No one defers to facts more than Mézières, and therefore his attempts to touch Shakespeare himself are not without meaning, e.g. if Hamlet's instructions to the players are Shakespeare's, why not Hamlet's philosophy? Although he has many of the best characteristics of French writers, he is not French in any narrow sense—and even his humour is English: as when he compares Henry V to a modern German who smokes and drinks beer while he meditates. If he is not among the greatest critics the reason is that observation predominates over experience. Even in one of his subtlest sayings—that Iago uses against Desdemona, in Othello's eyes, the sacrifices she has made to marry him—we detect rather the keen observer; and if his account of Antony's Eastern empire stands out from the rest of his pages, it is because here, as an exception, his imagination has caught fire.

#### IV

WE will now place the leading ideas of these three critics side by side. Guizot and Mézières reach the same conclusion about his patriotism. Guizot calls him a blind and passionate patriot, lacking impartiality; and Mézières describes his patriotism as blind and intolerant. Elsewhere

Mézières gives him absolute impersonality; and Chasles decides that his greatest quality was impartiality.

With Chasles he had the artist's passion to express his thought completely, and also incredible art in fusing contrary things. Guizot says that he lacked art but preserved unity of impression—that he has no rival in genius, but is hardly a model in the high and pure regions of art. Mézières admits that his genius has more force than measure, but he is an artist under a mask of irregularity, though his art is more a gift of nature than the result of experience.

We may class as a moral saying that of Chasles, that he had a lofty, firm, and pitiless judgement. Guizot calls him a deep moralist, who knows man's heart. Mézières maintains that he never forgets the moral point of view, that he always punishes the guilty, and believes in moral responsibility.

Chasles holds that every year his philosophy grew more tolerant, ironic, meditative; and Mézières, that reasoned tolerance was the last word of his philosophy. Mézières also speaks of his religious tolerance; while Chasles, on the subject of religion, says that he doubts all because he understands all, and is no sectarian.

Chasles and Mézières agree that he personified the genius of the North; and Guizot and Mézières, that he took the utmost care to please the public. . . .

These three writers are as appreciative at heart as their fellows in England and Germany, but more critical. France equally recognizes Shakespeare to be the supreme poet of the world, but does not accept the full doctrine of Coleridge that he is without fault.



## Chapter XVII

### GERMANY 1847-1860

I. HOFFMANN. II. TIECK. III. LUDWIG. IV. KREYSSIG. V. ROHRBACH.  
VI. WERDER. VII. VISCHER. VIII. CONCLUSION.

#### I

HOFFMANN,<sup>1</sup> writing on *Hamlet*, finds a certain connexion in the action as far as the close of the third act, but in the last acts events heaped upon each other without plan. The chief persons have been called interesting and amiable, yet without consecutiveness in their actions. Hamlet's means to carry out his aim are ill-planned; he considers secrecy necessary, and then betrays everything to his enemies in a play. He finally kills the King more to revenge himself than his father. How is all this to be reconciled?

After the Ghost appears Hamlet's behaviour entirely changes; melancholy becomes absolute disruption of mind. All seek the cause—and Polonius and the King discover that it is not love-madness. The King, who had formerly wished to keep him at court, now determines to be rid of him; therefore by his unusual behaviour Hamlet forfeits his opportunity for revenge. The prayer scene is the climax, and Hamlet could have made no greater mistake than to betray himself to the enemy through the play. It is the turning-point, and the King, by the means he takes to free himself from the dark bonds, draws them closer to his destruction. In vain had the Ghost exhorted Hamlet to kill his uncle and spare his mother. In vain had the murderer put forth skill and cunning to save himself. Everything turns out the reverse of what every one wishes: therefore the tragedy so rich in events flows from one and the same source.

Shakespeare achieved the difficult task of interesting us in a hero who, instead of enlisting our sympathy, seems rather to excite our contempt for his weakness. The hideous tale of the Ghost, like a Medusa's head, petrifies all his active powers. The Ghost's appearance is the core of the whole play and the cause of all that follows. If madness means want of consciousness Hamlet is certainly not mad. His self-consciousness is acute—he is made up of consciousness. When analysing life he looks only at that which is particular, and then flings into the abyss of despair. The particular to him is the universal; but as far as want of freedom and the ruin of his active powers he is mad. He sees himself that he has no power over his actions, and so explains Polonius's death to Laertes. A lie would have been mean and inconsistent with his character. Fettering of the will can coexist with great uprightness and morbidly keen insight and judgement. The fixed

<sup>1</sup> *Studien zu Sh.'s 'Hamlet'*, 1847.

idea that usually accompanies it Hamlet had not, but a profound melancholy instead, which hangs a heavy veil over everything.

His troubled soul has a respite from torture when engaged with the players. The only thing that seems to interest him is the introduction to the court-play. It contradicts all the rules of prudence, and decides the fate which destroys the royal house. Shakespeare put his whole soul into the scenes with the players—a soul, indeed, noble and strong, which under external and vulgar circumstances pursued so lofty an aim, solacing himself over the contradictions and conundrums of life, plainly shown in this play. . . .

The merit of this essay is that, through the discrepancy which it points out between the motives of the characters and the results of their actions, it makes us aware of a mysterious overruling fate. The thought is spun of finer material than contemporary German criticism of the kind of Ulrici and Gervinus. The author takes the facts of the play and reasons outward—subordinating events in the world of sense to the spiritual activity which produced them. He follows up a spiritual clue rather than seeks to impose a theory.

## II

TO Ludwig Tieck<sup>1</sup> Shakespeare's art is of the wonderful kind which expands the imagination and compels us to accept the most audacious fiction as fact. His supernatural beings belong to the traditional folk-superstitions of his country; but he takes the objects of popular imagination and ennobles and refines. He transfigures the common superstition into beautiful poetic fiction; he abolishes the childish and tasteless without destroying the strange and unusual. The quality of the supernatural varies according to the play, e.g. *Macbeth* and *M.N.D.* Nearly every work of Shakespeare's is distinct, the product of an individual and unique experience and feeling. The *Tempest* and *M.N.D.* deal with the same world and similar characters: it is the handling of the supernatural that gives to each its character.

Shakespeare preserves the illusion of his supernatural beings by transplanting us into a wholly supernatural world, so that what we see is not inconceivable. In reading *M.N.D.* we must not forget that it is a dream, and no doubt Shakespeare had taken note of his dreams and was using his experiences. In dreams the supernatural seems natural to us because we are entirely separated from the normal world. The illusion of the *Tempest* depends on our being throughout in a supernatural atmosphere, and there is thus nothing contradictory in what happens. It differs from *M.N.D.* in that it never returns to ordinary surroundings. The act of reinstating a prince is transfigured into something strange. The supernatural is raised to a higher level, because the chief character is idealized, and above human passions and

<sup>1</sup> 'Sh.'s Treatment of the Supernatural' (*Kritische Schriften*), 1848.

weaknesses. Miranda, especially by her marriage to Ferdinand, is a link with the actual world. Ariel and Caliban are like door-keepers to prevent us slipping out of the spirit world. The contrast between them enhances our belief in the supernatural.

Unlike Shakespeare's introductions, which are usually quiet, the first scene of the *Tempest* attunes us to the wonders to come. He understood the difficulty of introducing what is extraordinary or bordering on the supernatural into a normal world. He helps illusion by varied representation, and by keeping all feeling at a moderate pitch: supernatural beings alone would not be able to enlist prolonged interest. He preserves the unity of the play by drawing the line exactly between tragedy and comedy. Had he introduced among his supernatural company a love like that of Romeo and Juliet, or made Alonso mourn his son as Hamlet his father, their sorrows would have so exclusively engaged our sympathy that other odd beings would have been indifferent and improbable to us, and we might have objected to their interference in matters of such concern. The end of Act III has the most highly wrought feeling, but Shakespeare avoids all extreme of passion. Prospero is almost a supernatural being; and Alonso and his companions are not shown to us in depths of misery, and the appearance of spirits is not made alarming to them. *M.N.D.* is equally toned down, but the whole is less noble and beautiful. There is nothing here like the love, jealousy, and anger of Romeo, Othello, Leontes. Ariel or Puck would be unnatural in connexion with such passion—as happens in Fletcher's *Faithful Shepherdess* with the tragic jealousy and wrath of Perigot.

A comic element is also introduced to help the illusion by diverting our imagination and preventing it from fixing too searching an eye on imaginary beings who might not be able to stand it. Without comic figures like Trinculo and Stephano the play would be monotonous and the supernatural too wonderful for illusion. A curious dream is more illusive if we recognize in it a familiar figure; therefore Shakespeare introduces figures that seem contradictory in his magic world, but give individual features to the whole because they are commonplace, and make the rest more illusive and probable by drawing part of our attention. Yet as the comic figures of *M.N.D.* are not wholly left everyday beings, so Caliban is a link between the comic and marvellous. Himself only half comic, he brings Trinculo and Stephano into comic perspective: as Puck connects the comic persons of *M.N.D.* with the fairy world. Trinculo and Stephano are not actually comic, but are made so by their cowardice and love of drink; but, as with the higher feelings, Shakespeare does not wish to over-concentrate attention upon them. Parolles instead of Trinculo, Falstaff instead of Stephano, would have dominated the play. Music also helps illusion in preparing our mood.

In tragedy no intervening figure must turn our attention from the main subject; therefore the supernatural is subordinate to the main theme, and serves but to enhance the terrible and deepen emotion. It appears in lightning flashes—and terror at its appearance overthrows reason and judgement and so produces illusion. The appearance of the Witches, of the ghosts of Hamlet's father and Banquo are entirely incomprehensible, and their terror lies in the very mystery of their appearance. The Ghost in *Hamlet* says, 'But that I am forbid . . .', and the supernatural figures of the tragedies remain in this twilight of horror. The emotions of Hamlet when he sees the Ghost, and those of Macbeth at the ghost of Banquo, leave us in no doubt that they exist. Did we know them as well as Ariel and Caliban they would not arouse fear. Their mystery alarms; and the apparition in *J.C.* is less terrifying because Brutus is not overcome with horror. Even in the tragedies there is some kind of preparation for apparitions, or they would be too startling to impress us as real. Perhaps Shakespeare would have displayed more skill had he not opened *Macbeth* with the Witches. The *Hamlet* preparations are of the best—gradual dramatic heightening of suspense. In *Macbeth* we have seen Banquo's murder; and as soon as Macbeth speaks of him he appears. Had we not known of the murder the ghost would have been inexplicable. Music and dimmed lights are the prelude to the ghost of Caesar. Richard III's monologue after waking carries on the feeling of the supernatural, otherwise too abrupt.

Shakespeare's apparitions match his characters. The Ghost of *Hamlet* would not have affected Brutus or Caesar; and we cannot imagine Othello brought into contact with Macbeth's Witches. Usually but one person sees an apparition, for in a certain sense they are allegorical—although they do not personify mere abstract ideas, but individual feelings and ideas. But Shakespeare is truly dramatic and makes the onlooker see all. Richard's fear and Macbeth's horror are more terribly portrayed than by any verbal description. Hamlet's inner and self-consciousness is revealed when, about to speak daggers to his mother, he is again confronted by the Ghost. If possible, Shakespeare lets his characters put a natural construction on strange events: Miranda thinks her sleep natural; and the characters of *M.N.D.* think that all has been a dream. But Hamlet and Macbeth might have thought the Ghost and Witches creations of fancy, and the effect would have been lost—had they not been corroborated by friends. . . .

The total effect of this essay is to exalt Shakespeare's art. Tieck looks steadily at his subject, and his theories are the direct offspring of his impressions. Twice he tends to become more speculative, and in one instance he fails and in the other comes true. It seems to us that he fails in blaming Shakespeare for opening *Macbeth* with a witch scene, and succeeds in proving that the apparitions of one play would impress little those of another. Otherwise he achieves legitimate effects by

drawing a small circle round Shakespeare and keeping within it. He theorizes on what Shakespeare gives, not on what he thinks he ought to give, and his best work is in showing how the supernatural and the characters are interdependent. He has a lighter touch than some of his contemporaries, and he helps our insight into the unity of Shakespeare's plays. Shakespeare the artist is revealed in his pages, for whom the true is the offspring of the beautiful.

### III

TO Otto Ludwig<sup>1</sup> the harmonious and charming impression produced by *R. and J.* is due to the fact that the lovers absorb the interest throughout, and accomplish their own tragedy. No person causes the catastrophe, but a family feud, a thing that arouses neither love nor hate, and therefore in no way distracts interest from the central figures, but rather adds to it by helping to create their pathetic situation. As in *Hamlet* we see the advantage of a situation or fact governing the play and taking the place of a leading personage who would have distracted interest from the hero.

Shakespeare never forgets that he is writing for the stage; he has it in mind in portraying passion, in displaying intimate feeling, in individual style of conversation, even in the different humours: all help to give a right complexion to the play. Where the tragic-poetic blends with the theatrical, there we have the true theatric-dramatic-tragic. In 'exposition' scenes, where clearness is the chief aim, he is inclined to be dry, but in other scenes every detail of feeling is given, and every detail becomes a gesture—of thought, humour, speech, attitude, tone. In *Hamlet's* soliloquy thought itself passionately gesticulates, groans, wrings its hands, turns and moves to and fro in agitation, longing to free itself like a troubled spirit. The leading character is a play within a play; the other characters stand towards him as the spectators to them. To these he is shown first by himself, and secondly by the remarks and judgements of those about him, till he becomes transparent.

With few exceptions, such as Shylock, Shakespeare's characters are all ordinary men and women: vehicles of the passions that he wishes to portray. The main thing is not what the hero does, but what he suffers and feels. Passion is portrayed in its completeness, from its first small beginnings till it causes the death of its victim. Shakespeare paints a great suffering like that of *Lear*, or chooses a character in which passion runs its normal course, like *Romeo*—a man naturally susceptible to love and ready to abandon himself to it. He chooses for his fire the fuel that will most fully show up the figures he brings before us.

A virtuoso in dialogue, he gives to each character his or her special manner of speech. This skill in speech is a chief ground for his great-

<sup>1</sup> *Sh. Studien*, 1851-60.

ness as a dramatist. Note the spontaneous dialogue between Shylock, Bassanio, Antonio.

*Hamlet* is less dramatic and more concise than the other tragedies; the monologues are the kernel of the play, and the other scenes are built round them. The motive is more listless and deficient, and there is much to astonish. It is strange that Hamlet never gives a reason for his affected madness, seeing how wrapped he is in inner feelings. To gain his object he had better have remained pleasing, cheerful, and sane. He has no reason to dissimulate, but needs only not to betray himself. Dissimulation is more likely to have the reverse effect—to betray rather than conceal. The whole situation is awry: the King must know how matters stand with him; the courtiers say that danger threatens the King, but do not penetrate to the cause—and yet only by knowing it can they suspect Hamlet. Hamlet must know that danger threatens him, if the King suspects: then why dissimulate? Neither takes any measure to defend himself, and why does the mother send for him? Was there no surer way of killing Hamlet than by a poisoned rapier, the wound of which will betray a plot? Does Hamlet not suspect that he has caused Ophelia's death? His trouble has not destroyed his feeling, for he fights with Laertes to prove that he loves her most. Horatio is upright and honest and cannot approve that Hamlet should send Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to death. It is strange that in this most introspective of the plays we are left throughout in the dark as regards motives. The story of no other play is so arbitrary, the characters less fully convincing, the humour more often lacking uniformity, the whole so disconnected, the parts so disproportioned. The part of Ophelia is slight, and sketched in a way unlike the usual Shakespeare. Polonius is a different person in the first scene and elsewhere. It is the only play where the crime is not that of the hero himself; it is rich in scenes, but with little action. Hamlet's character is a collapse after a violent flare up of emotion; melancholy is the habitual habit of his mind. The Ophelia scenes, even the figure itself, are not absolutely necessary. But all enriches occasions for meditative thought, and gives Hamlet opportunity for renowned scenes. Ophelia's madness adds a tender elegiac note to the tragic harmony. She helps to expose the conception of Hamlet's character, and with it the idea of the whole play.

Shakespeare lays no stress on outward circumstances, and will not admit that anything outside a man decides his fate. His idea of tragedy is the necessary connexion between crime and punishment. He describes passion itself, he does not merely give a passionate description of it. Sin is the child of freedom; it sets the clock going, and nothing from outside can stop it. Schiller says that his hero could not be or act otherwise; Shakespeare, how differently his hero might have acted. *J.C.* shows how character to him is of more importance than situation. His

manner is dramatic: a character can only develop through action, while a situation can be treated lyrically and rhetorically. Development of character, or rather character-drama, requires direct speech, not rhetoric.

Shakespeare's persons appear real because they have heterogeneous elements of character. Hamlet attracts because he mingles strength and weakness. Both may spring from the same root, and this must be seen in the dramatic character, or it contradicts nature, since man does not possess all sides of his nature in equal force.

The double tale in the plays is like the double organs in the human body. Through Lear and Gloucester the one soul of tragedy looks out upon us as through two eyes. A leading idea animates the whole play and each character, and gives the action unity. Unity consists in the conception of the chief character: thus Richard III embodies the spirit of history: the play is not the idealization of a portion of history. All is typical and universal, with neither romantic<sup>1</sup> element nor historical element romantically conceived. Inexhaustible representation of such a nature as Richard's creates the unity. *Timon* at first is typical, but with the finding of the gold the type ends and the individual begins.

Shakespeare does not detract from his tragedy by mingling comedy with it, because the comedy is not in the situation, but in the persons. The Fool in *Lear* throws comic gleams of light on the situation, but his feelings are as serious as those of any one else in the play, and therefore it is tragedy comically expressed. When Hamlet jokes it is to hide his despair, weariness, chagrin. Humorous self-description, sadness, and self-pity in making sport of one's self are not comic.

True tragedy must make us aware of one whole idea that overshadows every detail, and convinces that the course of events is inevitable. The guilt of the other characters in *Lear* all arises from that of Lear himself, and all again affects his suffering.

Shakespeare is no ascetic, but teaches the kind of worldly wisdom that makes the world serviceable. His art is one with life and reality, and he is a moral poet in so far as he makes conscience finally triumph. This world in its course taken altogether is moral, and does not defer punishment to the next world. We cannot overstep the kingdom of sense without paying for it with our best powers. Richard II, Hamlet, Lear are men of temperament; Macbeth, Coriolanus, Richard III, Othello, men of passion; and Romeo is midway between them. The former have no fixed aim, and if they reach a goal it is from some external pressure. Shakespeare's tragedies are eternally true, for he shows us no heroes of virtue, but only men of natural impulse. They undertake hazardous enterprises for which their nature is not fit: hence the tragic suffering. Strength of passion makes them imposing, and the tragedy is that they give up their whole beings. Some flaw becomes

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Goethe, the Schlegels, Heine.

the mainspring, but where the higher desires are stronger the characters do not go under, e.g. Edgar.

Shakespeare never poetizes moral feelings, but lifts everything into a high, large atmosphere. He does not make men better than they are by nature, but simple and natural, and never sickly or sentimental. Nowhere speculative, he takes his ground on experience. No poet is so true to life, yet he can use art to give a natural colouring to what is not true—such as the scene of the wooing of Lady Anne which convinces, though not a word is true to nature. But art assuming the semblance of nature is true art.

Contrast is the secret of dramatic effect, i.e. Iago and Othello, and Shakespeare's art is based on contrast, external and internal—character, motives, mingled comedy and tragedy. He shows the world without the contradictions that mislead us: we detect its hidden motives and read his characters through and through. His world is a school wherein to learn reality.

There is always something elevated in his women—and he never allows the impression of the actual situation to be so strong that we lose the sense of the modesty which is the distinguishing mark of the nature of his women. Hence no woman is ever the only chief character in tragedy. Shakespeare is careful not to draw attention and sympathy away from the chief character. In *Macbeth* Duncan is quickly forgotten, and we feel no interest in the sons. In *Richard III* some pity is aroused in others since it enhances our shuddering admiration of cold-blooded, iron power of covetous will.

In developing character Shakespeare lets only the innate come to light. We come to know Shylock and Portia, but it does not alter their characters. Portia's consistent serenity makes her attractive; though Juliet deceives her father she is not untruthful by nature. According to Shakespeare human nature is unchangeable. A characteristic variety of reality helps the full representation of different figures: with Juliet the summer night; with Macbeth the wild heath and storm; with Hamlet the frosty midnight. Ophelia would not be Ophelia without the willow and water. . .

In an earlier notice of Ludwig we complained of his abstractions; and he is a difficult critic to condense and analyse for characteristic matter. He does not take up a position at the heart of Shakespeare, but approaches him by a number of circuitous paths. We will therefore treat him as he treats his subject—by examining his most characteristic remarks for a distinguishing theory. And these are—that *R. and J.* shows the advantage of a situation governing a play—that Hamlet's death was ill-contrived by a poisoned rapier—that Timon is first typical, then individual—that the comedy intermixed with tragedy is not in the situation but the persons—that Lear is the cause of guilt in others—that Edgar, in whom higher desires prevail,



does not go under—that women alone do not dominate tragedy—that human nature is unchangeable. If these apparently disparate sayings can be traced to a common root, it is this—that Shakespeare used all means at his disposal—art, nature, beauty, worldly wisdom and reality, history, stage-craft, even individual peculiarities—to reveal the essence of man's soul.

#### IV

F. KREYSSIG<sup>1</sup> announces that even the genius depends on his age, and Shakespeare's image must be seen in the perspective of the England of his time. There was little personal liberty in his day; since the Wars of the Roses the power of the sovereign had increased and that of the nobles declined. Yet the Tudor despotism lacked the basis of absolute power—a standing army. In case of need the sovereign had to appeal to gentlemen and freemen, and to rely on Parliamentary grants. Elizabeth might insult her courtiers, but she was gracious to the masses. The masses were prosperous and the court splendid. A hungry people could not have produced a Falstaff, a Hotspur, a Falconbridge. It was due to the Reformation that there were few bigoted Catholics or Protestants; and this favoured the poet who had to portray the many sides of human nature. Learning flourished at court and spread to the people. Chapman's *Homer* was a popular book; and old ballads and folk-lore and stories of witches and fairies made up the atmosphere in which Shakespeare lived.

The drama, most of the arts, depends on external conditions. The Church opposed the decadent Roman drama, but knew that the dramatic instinct cannot be crushed, and supplied carnivals, &c. The Gospel and stories of the saints became to the faithful what stories of gods and heroes had been to the Greeks. The next stage in the romantic drama of Shakespeare appears in the masked Eastern processions of biblical and legendary heroes. In Languedoc in the second century arose a new kind of art from which the English miracle play sprang. At first the clergy were the actors, and this was the true germ of the Shakespearian drama. Later they became increasingly the productions of the people; and the comic relief provided by Father Noah in the Chester and Coventry Cycles anticipates the comic scenes in Shakespeare's tragedies. Another element of comedy was the satirizing of manners of the period, e.g. Satan appears as a fop. It was the transitional form between the Mysteries, with their realistic basis, and the representation of contemporary life. Abstraction precedes observation, and in art we get the Moralities of the fifteenth century. Abstractions such as *Justitia*, *Fides*, *Veritas* are represented; and the Moralities bequeathed to the English drama the national figure of the 'Vice'—the forerunner of Shakespeare's clowns. The Interludes were

<sup>1</sup> *Lectures on Sh.*, 1858-60.

again a step nearer to national comedy—a bridge between represented abstract psychological qualities and true dramatic characterization. These were the first attempts at true English comedy, while the pathetic elements of the Mysteries lead to the national tragic drama.

The age following the middle of the sixteenth century was distinguished by wonderful creative energy. Inspiration came from France, Italy, and classical literature—and translations put classical treasures into the hands of the people. In a play like *King Cambyses* (1561) we see the germ of Shakespearian tragedy. It has also a strain of popular comedy, and we get the prototype of such characters as Nym, Pistol, and Bardolph. Young English tragedy is struggling to emerge from the rigid form of the Moralities. Pedantry, coarse humour, action, and moral earnestness await the touch of genius. Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy* influenced Shakespeare's early work. We have the same peculiarities and excesses, and also energetic action and attempt at true dramatic structure, with the strong natural pathos and fresh characterization in which English drama at the period excels the French. The merit of Marlowe's work is power, pathos, greater unity of action; its defect, lack of wisdom and moderation. In his stormy characters we have at fever-pitch the same spirit as in Macbeth, Edmund, and Iago. His Jew is the model for Shylock, and Edward II's monologue reminds us of Richard II. Between the genius of Marlowe and Shakespeare there is a gap, but we see that the forms of the national tragedy were ready when Shakespeare appeared, and the national taste prepared for him. This is still more the case in comedy, where there is organic development from the Middle Ages to Shakespeare. After the Interludes came *Ralph Roister Doister* and *Gammer Gurton's Needle*, where classical influence mingles with coarse national humour. A generation is between these early comedies and the early comedy of Shakespeare. Lyly is to his comedy what Kyd and Peele were to his tragedy. Lyly's characterization is superficial, but his Campaspe is delicately sketched, and reminds us of Shakespeare's best feminine characters. Lyly also writes gracefully of fairies and elves. Shakespeare besides drew on the popular humour of early English comedy, and on the translations of Plautus, Terence, and Ariosto.

If Shakespeare introduces anachronisms into his plays, it is in fantastic pieces intentionally divorced from reality; while elsewhere he shows accurate knowledge of law, history, &c. He did not ignore the literary equipment of the age, but mastered its forms—even Euphuism—before he created his own style. *Venus* and *Lucrece* are written in the language of the elegant circles of his day, and action is superseded by rhetoric; yet Shakespeare touched even this style with his genius and infused it with power. The passion and depth of the Sonnets come from his own experience, and could not be what they are were their origin impersonal. They contain some over-refinements and

involutions, as with Daniel and Drayton, and also moral speculations. We see Shakespeare's philosophy of life in the love of truth and hatred of falsity. Sonnets 123-5 bear the stamp of the most intimate revelation of the heart. Others witness to his lofty soul, and to the love, faithfulness, and mildness attributed to him by contemporaries.

After his death his fame declined from various causes, but from the middle of the eighteenth century there has been steady advance in appreciation of his genius. His 'totality' appears in his treatment of individual characters. The variety of his characters is such that no two are alike in all his dramas. The actor of Shakespeare's smallest part dare not venture on a merely conventional interpretation. It is otherwise with the Latin drama, e.g. Calderon's plays contain typical characters—the Lady, the Judge, &c. Even Molière only succeeded in caricaturing special traits. This is the basis of Shakespeare's work—his tragic heroes depart positively and his comic heroes negatively from the norm. In the historical plays he combines poetic freedom with the true spirit of the times. The figures of the past are to him not only an inspiration, but a warning.

*Richard II* keeps more closely than the others to historical facts. The cause of Richard's fall is in himself; it is not merely the downfall of an artist-temperament, but his unbridled fantasy would have wrecked a poet no less than a king. 'Ay, no; no, ay' is the true motto of his character. Bolingbroke has no personal quarrel with Richard; his aim is power. The secondary figures of the new era are barely outlined, and only appear clearly in the later plays: as if Shakespeare wished to show first of all the inner necessity of the catastrophe, and relatively to justify the new order. He takes no sides; if he is the champion of old England, it is with unbiassed mind and keen insight. Few of his works afford deeper insight into his genius than *Henry IV*. We see the usurper's difficulties: evil begets evil, with the result that decision is still deferred to future times. The plot diminishes, rather than heightens, interest towards the end. According to the significance of the action the play would rank last of all the histories; and yet it makes the most powerful impression. Often the less promising material stimulates Shakespeare's genius, viz. his art of characterization. He is the greatest moralist of all time in this sense, that in a given action he perceives a certain ethical elation, follows it out to its innermost laws, and presents it in a series of typical figures. Often by artistic grouping he emphasizes the antithesis of the leading idea. Action counts for less than the relation between outward valuation and inner work. In *Henry IV*, on the one hand, we have the fantasts of honour, on the other, politicians to whom honour is a means, not an end. Falstaff and his comrades represent unbridled natural instinct as opposed to the principles of society. Prince Henry, who is the darling of Shakespeare's muse, plays with his comrades, but is of finer clay, and his tricks are

harmless. When the deed demands it he becomes serious and heroic. His sharp break with his old comrades has yet a warm human touch, 'For competence of life I will allow you'. Hotspur is the Prince's counterpart, but their unlikeness—Hotspur's unrestrained ambition—is the latter's essential weakness. It is the cause of his fall, yet the glory of his end reconciles us aesthetically and humanly to his character. The theme of the play is the relation of outward to inward honour: a motif which occurs in the Prince, Hotspur, and even Glendower. These leading figures are surrounded by the politicians—men of success and possessions, to whom honour is a means, not an end. The King is a martyr of success and self-seeking favoured by fortune. Careworn and sleepless, he embodies Shakespeare's view that the moral order transgressed avenges itself on the transgressor. Falstaff is one of Shakespeare's most carefully drawn characters—both individual and type. English critics rightly perceive in him a poignant lesson in morality. He is too deeply sunk in sensual pleasures to be able to raise himself, or to use opportunity for honourable position when offered him. Yet he influences all around, and wins affection; he has no illusions even about himself, and no outward shows impose on him. His soliloquy on honour is the catechism of all Philistines of every age and race. In leading to his inevitable downfall, Shakespeare makes him gradually become more trivial, gross, and common. *Henry V* is essentially a glorification of one nationality, and as such makes less appeal to foreign readers; yet all can feel its poetic power. The conception is carried out by the concrete representation of a definite phase of national development. All the subordinate scenes serve either to contrast the two opposed nationalities or bring to a satisfactory conclusion certain figures which have roused interest in the former play. The whole serves as a canvas for the central figure of Henry. In the midst of his dignity he keeps the sense of humour—the accompaniment of his good conscience, which distinguishes him from his father. He is sincerely religious; he preserves the humour gained in Eastcheap; and his rough wooing of Katharine is in keeping with his character. In depicting the English army Shakespeare makes prominent the professional soldiers—Fluellen, Jamy, Macmorris. The disciplined English army is the antithesis to the windy chivalry of France. We see the logical end of Nym, Bardolph, Pistol, which justifies the King's repudiation. Shakespeare gives a faithful picture of the army from highest to lowest. He has been accused of prejudice, but it was the time of the decadence of French chivalry, and he had the right to contrast it with the solidity of the English national character.

Though *Henry VI* is not altogether lacking in Shakespeare's peculiar charm, it is difficult to attribute to him the play with its crudities and incongruities. Parts II and III justify the moral course of the world; their motto might be, 'Whom the gods wish to destroy

they make mad'. The motivation is clear, nothing is left to chance, and fate is within each man himself. Shakespeare honours religion, but does not let it interfere with natural causation or development of character or personal responsibility.<sup>1</sup> This life of the emotions makes Henry a martyr to his calling and a curse to his people. He is a 'beautiful soul', but in politics failure is crime<sup>2</sup> and begets crime, and in the end he cannot keep his purity of heart, but becomes perjured. This courage in showing a hard truth gives a certain acerbity to Shakespeare's work. In the scenes of Cade's rebellion his art is at its best. Shakespeare's popular scenes of rebellion are unrivalled for humour, power, and gravity, and belong to no special period, but are typical scenes. The scenes of vengeance on the battle-field remind us of ancient tragedy. The highest point of tragedy is reached in the symbolic scene where the son appears who has killed his father, &c. We see Shakespeare's full power in many passages which pave the way for the monstrous character of Richard III. Richard is a historic symbol, the incarnation of the degeneration of a whole age—one who cannot be judged by the laws of individual responsibility and guilt. 'The sins of the fathers are visited on the children': this makes his character morally possible and tragically justifiable. Removed from his age he would seem the fantastic abortion of an excited brain. *Richard III* is Shakespeare's first undoubted and independent work. As a whole it suggests the working out of divine justice. Except the Princes, every victim is the prey of his own wickedness or folly. The conqueror in the civil war is surrounded by perjured murderers: why, then, should he keep faith or be merciful? Shakespeare has painted a picture of a time in which guilt and innocence are so confused that our regret for the individual turns into awe at a relentless natural necessity. The great glory of the piece is the way in which Shakespeare has solved the difficult problem of arousing tragic sympathy for a misshapen villain. He has accomplished the task by making Richard more than a mere individual: in the results of his evil deeds he becomes a scourge wielded by the gods. He has outstanding intellectual power, and we admire the self-command that enables a naturally headstrong and rough nature to dissemble. We also note his physical and moral courage, and his sincerity with himself.<sup>3</sup> The cycle of guilt and atonement is now complete.

*Henry VIII* is not a symbolic play, and contains no cultural tendency or ideas. Shakespeare simply dramatized events with almost terrifying faithfulness. There is no true poetic action, and no moral truth is inculcated; it is written for an age rather than all time. An occasional work, it takes a low rank in Shakespeare's poetry.

The splendour of diction and character-interest of *John* approach

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Birch and Watkiss Lloyd.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Dowden.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Mézières on monologue.

Shakespeare's best period. He ignored Magna Carta because the question of the Constitution was in the background under the Tudors, and the interest John's reign had for poets was the religious interest. John is ruined, according to Shakespeare, because he breaks the moral law, not from the ecclesiastical ban. The problem is to reconcile the portrayal of so miserable a character with the patriotic tendencies of the time—and Shakespeare solves it, and preserves historical perspective by transferring the accent from politics and ecclesiastical matters to human feeling. The King is a usurper, but what alienates his subjects is rather his lack of understanding and self-control, his weakness, and the foul murder. As before in Shakespeare's early work, the violence of women outdoes that of men. Constance is just within the bounds of what is aesthetically permissible. The episode of Austria satisfies patriotic rather than aesthetic feeling. Shakespeare does not resolve the dissonances of reality by lamenting the fate of the fair upon earth. To the destructive powers he opposes creative and protective powers. Hubert is a contrast to the politicians, no man of principle, but with a good heart. The Bastard is the salt of the drama, and, like a chorus, type of man of action and success.

*J.C.* belongs to Shakespeare's best period, and touches the high-water mark of poetry. Shakespeare has been praised for catching the ancient spirit, but rather he does so only when there is an inner relation between the conditions he paints and the English life of his time. Englishmen understood, in the Tudor epoch, the transition from oligarchical-aristocratic to monarchical government. Brutus, Cassius, and Coriolanus were comprehensible to them—while the Roman crowd is that of all times and places. Brutus is the real hero, the man of abstract and exalted, rather than clear, thinking—and of deep feeling. Like Hamlet he is roused to reality by the facts, but the two men differ in their reactions. His point of view is that of modern moralist rather than ancient republican. Schiller said that love of a real object and devotion to an ideal may lead to the greatest inner conflicts, and that the idealist may strike at other men's liberties no less than the egoist. Brutus undergoes this tragedy of conflicting ideals. His lofty mind is touched by superstition; he mistakes anonymous letters for the voice of Rome. The abstract thinker makes a bad conspirator: by sparing Antony he undoes the work he has begun. Portia is his feminine counterpart, and in contrast to these idealist figures we have the worshippers of success, from Caesar to the mob. Caesar, by his dignity and fearless death, most nearly approaches the ideal. He realized that the many are more afraid of a name than the thing for which it stands. Cassius is morally and perhaps aesthetically below Caesar. His outlook is not ideal, and his doubtful political honesty goes to the very limit of tragic dignity.

The diction of *A. and C.* is bold, almost obscure—and there is an

underlying acerbity which belongs to the period of *Coriolanus* and *Timon*. Shakespeare achieves splendid scenic grouping, and by subtle touches indicates psychological perspectives, and impresses the whole with life. There is no conflict of abstract ideals, hence it lacks the grandeur of *J.C.*—and there is a bitter, undisguised contempt for the world and humanity, which recalls Shakespeare's most gloomy and serious work. The tragic interest is less great because the characters are not the victims of irreconcilable moral ideas; yet the scenic arrangement, the power of the dialogue, and the fine characterization make it one of the best of the historical plays. In the foreground is the hero of genius and unrestrained sensuality, and, beside him, the incarnation of poetry in the woman who has all beauty, grace, and passion without discipline or sense of duty. In accordance with reality Shakespeare paints clearly the soldier mind; for when society loses morality the army is the last resort of power and discipline. The soldiers differ from those of *Henry V* whom duty and patriotism bind to society. Soldiering is now a business, and the leader may be deserted if it is unprofitable to follow him. Shakespeare's women fall into three main groups, representing the moral or the sensual element in feminine nature, or the fine blending of the two: e.g. (1) Imogen and Isabella; (2) Lady Macbeth; (3) Viola and Portia (*Merchant*). Lady Macbeth is possessed by the demon of ambition, Cleopatra by that of vanity and sensuality. The nature of both is so rich and powerful that, poetically, it compensates for the infraction of the law of normal development.<sup>1</sup> Shakespeare reveals Cleopatra's attraction in her behaviour—a mixture of cold calculation and passionate sensuality. His age allowed him freedom of speech, but since there were no women actors he had to rely on psychological subtleties to convey the feminine charms. He leaves it uncertain what part is played in her by passion, by calculation, and by a nobler feeling for Antony. The pathos of her end is magnificently worked out from Plutarch's hints. The conversation with the Clown is a wonderful instance of the tragic effect of blending the comic with the pathetic: the Clown's indifference conveys the sense of her utter loneliness. The death scene resolves the many contradictions in this character. There is a parallelism between Antony and Cleopatra: beauty in her, genius and natural nobility in him, make their lack of morality aesthetically tolerable. His love almost makes us forget the unworthiness of its object; and in his end we see again the Roman warrior. The everyday folk are a foil to the heroic figures, and a measure by which we judge their greatness. Octavia moves in the sphere of cold mediocrity which surrounds the fantastic figures of Antony and Cleopatra.

To the classical story of Coriolanus Shakespeare has applied all his knowledge of human nature and love of truth. We see in Coriolanus

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Hudson and Heraud.

the self-destruction of the nature of a heroic aristocrat who forgets the only safe basis for aristocracy—the subordination of subjective feeling to the code of his class, and personal ambition to patriotism. Shakespeare has a natural bias to aristocracy, but does not condone its sins or limitations. In some important points he deviates from the historical narrative, the most striking being his representation of the people. They become the mob of a modern city with an absolute monarchical government, without political consciousness. The better traits of a rude power and goodness of heart which he allows them are not specifically ancient or Roman. He most emphasizes their cowardice, which even Menenius, their best advocate, admits. They are more like Cade's followers than the founders of the Roman Republic. Shakespeare treats the Tribunes even worse, and fulminates against the envy of the mediocre for the powerful. Yet do they really slander Coriolanus, who would hack the starving folk in pieces? Plutarch's narrative is so full of contradictions that not even Shakespeare could give it psychological truth and dramatic unity. Caste feeling has seldom been more bitterly (perhaps unintentionally) satirical than in the scenes in Rome when Coriolanus is at the gate. In these scenes we miss Shakespeare's wonted profound and careful motivation. Menenius is less admirable than some have thought him: he owes his popularity to a negative quality. His malice spends itself in words, and his plebeian manners partly bridge the gulf fixed by his aristocratic feeling between himself and the people. In Coriolanus Shakespeare boldly overpasses the normal dimensions of human strength and errors. He was guided by Plutarch who himself brings out the fact to which Shakespeare gave full psychological weight—the decisive significance of the family for aristocratic thinking, doing, feeling. The basis of aristocratic sentiment is natural and inborn self-love, raised and purified to a moral principle and extended to the artificial family of 'good society'. Volumnia is a typical example of the matron of ancient Rome, and from her Coriolanus inherits his contempt of the people. Her political subtlety is unpleasing, as appears in her advice to her son. Shakespeare took her character from his historian—a figure of ancient times which he would hardly have created. Coriolanus has great virtues; he is a general and statesman, though foolhardy. He dislikes outward recognition, but his modesty is due to a high ideal of himself. Yet his monologue, 'What custom wills . . .' (II. iii.), shows him at variance with the true conservative principles. He opposes subjective feeling to sacred custom, and forgets that absolute personal freedom spells isolation. He remains a terrible *memento mori* of self-seeking. The enemy's praise of him mitigates the catastrophe aesthetically.

*R. and J.* and the four great tragedies are five poems with an undoubted family likeness, impossible to be imitated. What is unique



is glow and force of language, and depth and originality of character-drawing. Above all is Shakespeare's free, unprejudiced, and sovereign thinking of the great battle of life: he is equally at home among realities and airy imaginations—oracles, elves, phantoms, dogma, witches, deities, all cults. These do not influence the soul of the poem, but only the free, responsible will of the virtuous man reigns. Shakespeare has the courage to see that the laws of this world are not self-contained, that justice goes beyond.<sup>1</sup> What avails it to Macbeth's victims that he is overthrown by one more powerful? Consider Gloster, Lear, Cordelia, Romeo and Juliet and family peace, Desdemona! With Shakespeare decision always rests with free responsible man. He is the poet of Protestantism, but no hard abstruse Calvinism. He works in poetical symbols before the race has become consciously philosophic.

*Titus* is like Kyd's work, with signs of Shakespeare's genius, and is no doubt genuine. It is above his predecessors, in that motives are clearly and energetically combined. He adds motive to the character-drawing, and his deep and magnificent method appears in this early piece. He does not soften the tradition of Tamora's cruelty, but raises the common criminal to a tragic heroine in showing us her holiest (mother's) feelings hurt. The Moor he fails to explain, but there is something in him which enables us to bear him, though he is not aesthetically justifiable. Something of his afterwards becomes one of Shakespeare's main dramatic motives—abstract pleasure in crime, as with Richard III, Iago, Edmund. *Titus* foreshadows Lear when he promises his daughter; but Shakespeare has not yet learned to follow the smallest movements of the feelings to the innermost depths of the heart. In the peasant who brings the writing to the Emperor, Shakespeare shows a sketch of Hamlet's genial indifference to the fate of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. The end is typical of Shakespeare and far superior to Kyd: here is instinctive what afterwards is artistically conscious in *R. and J.* and other tragedies—the deep conviction that individual passion is hopeless against the fundamentals of society. The diction at times reaches high poetical power, e.g. the first speech of *Titus*, the lamentation for his dead sons. Already Shakespeare develops the whole power of his language, and shows himself at his best in portraying those delicate traits of the deepest inner life of his heroes. The whole play shows the faults of youth, of one inclined to cut the thickening knot of fate instead of carefully unravelling.

In *R. and J.* Shakespeare appears not only the painter of love, but its physiologist. He works out diligently all subordinate roles, and the humorous and pathetic scenes. In the rapid action of the balcony scene we see the bond of love formed through mutual confession. We

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Dowden and Bradley.

ask whence comes the triumphal heroism of this delicate woman, while the man is like a reed agitated by the storm of delirious fear and hope? The answer is that Shakespeare made a single excursion into that region where Goethe was a master—into those limited but richer quarters of purely human individual feelings—in particular the mysteries of the mightiest of all passions, love. But in this most ardent and passionate of his poems he appears the champion of morality. The play ends rather with the hope that things will right themselves than with resignation to devastating grief.

Posterity has regarded *Hamlet* as a prophetic manifestation of German nature. It was considered a political confession of faith, and the highest standard of aesthetic and literary education. In elaborating the legend Shakespeare used more freedom than was his wont, taking from the original only the outlines of the plot, and presenting the hero in modern life and surroundings. With his mighty realistic instinct he makes the Danish prince martyr of his education and ingenuousness among the aristocratic society of the sixteenth century. He is the only Shakespearian character who becomes the medium of the poet's own artistic conception. The general impression is given in Ophelia's splendid picture of him. The whole interest is concentrated in his inner life: the conflict of duties being more pronounced than in Shakespeare's other dramas. He fails because he cannot make up his mind, and is a victim to fantasies and philosophical doubts. A better opportunity presents itself than he could have expected, but he is merely frightened. He wishes to transfer his responsibility to fate, and plunges his dagger through the tapestry. He kills the insignificant old man, and shows no sign of regret, nor consideration for Ophelia's feelings. This points the moral of over-refined education, and shows that lack of will, even when clad in fine spiritual vigour, brings more misfortune than callous outrage. It is the tragedy of modern aesthetic, 'hot-house' culture. Shakespeare alone recognized the symptoms of the growing spiritual morbidity of the end of the sixteenth century.<sup>1</sup> Over-developed intelligence and education lead to tragic climax because they conflict with serious duties. The general impression remains that the actual Hamlet is not the tragic incarnation of the modern human spirit surrounded by the influences of a rough century, but an ingenious, and noble, though one-sided, aesthete.

*Othello* unfolds a picture of human wickedness, narrow-minded weakness, and raving passion, which exceeds the limits of bestiality. Wickedness triumphs over open-hearted sincerity; and jealousy—most terrible and brutal of passions—dominates imagination, conscience, and will. We miss poetry and humour and joy, and only hear raging passion and lamenting grief. The tragedy is great because it describes faithfully the most dangerous illness of the human soul, the seed of

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Montégut.

which is in all of us—because the characters are true to nature—and because of the moral tone as well as the genius with which Shakespeare interprets the natural connexion between suffering and wrong-doing. The love between Othello and Desdemona was created by fantasy. Othello knows nothing of the inner state of an educated society. Shakespeare wonderfully makes credible these dramatic characters—this marriage of eagle and dove. The heroine—innocent as Miranda—naturally creates for herself an ideal of virile male personality unlike her surroundings. Iago has a family likeness to Edmund and Richard III, and is distantly related to Falconbridge and Mercutio. He is one in whom pitiless power of intellect sweeps away hazy sentiment. Such persons, though they freeze our feelings, have a stimulating and disillusioning effect. They represent the worldly, practical element of English character—its useful, though not handsome, alloy. Finally passion conquers reason—a stern and vehement (but no longer artistically fine) indication of the beast which hides in every human being. Our tortured senses are relieved when the sun of reason reappears; but the soul is not moved to joy or enlightenment—the only occasion that Shakespeare fails to achieve this throughout his tragedies.

*Lear* gives us the cruellest work of fate in the history of the drama. Only a faint gleam of sunshine lightens up the end of this horrid chaos, this orgy of victorious, satanic wickedness, when Albany and Edgar settle the account. Shakespeare skilfully inserts the terrible episode of the Gloster family, and expresses in these scenes his profoundest thoughts on human desires and ambitions. Lear, whom fortune has spoilt, appears on the stage tired of the pleasures of high worldly power, and prepared to abdicate in a sort of insolent mood. He behaves like a man already deranged in mind when he asks his children to compete in flattery before the whole court. He wished to surrender the burdens and duties of his position, but it never entered his mind that his power would be diminished. His rage expresses itself in a mad curse against Goneril; but this senseless fit of temper inevitably decreases our sympathy. Also his first thoughts were to revenge himself and revoke his gift. But now Shakespeare succeeds in stirring up all our pity for Lear through the symbolization of Nature. It is impossible to describe the awful magnificence and horrible truth to nature of the scene on the heath. The ray of the sun of Truth falling on the night of madness illumines the depths of Lear's mind—and this redeems his character from selfishness. Goneril and Regan are hard and selfish intellectual persons. Shakespeare finely portrays their degeneration so as to justify aesthetically their appearance in the drama. It does not excuse Edmund because at times he had met with humiliation. He has been compensated with many excellent gifts for his one misfortune. And he revenges himself on the very people who have tried to make

his life easy. Shakespeare stresses the fact that the external world belongs not to those who feel, but to those whose will is controlled by intellect. Cordelia is the most difficult character for the spectator of the tragedy to judge. With exaggerated love for truth she helps to seal her own misfortune. From the patriotic point of view it was wrong to make a foreign attack on her country.<sup>1</sup> But it is a superstition to think that right always triumphs. Shakespeare was contributing dramatically to this mighty problem. He dared to hand over on the stage the life of a single character to a malicious fate, as in daily life. He sacrificed outer things to the dark powers, but preserved the moral in the human soul. Cordelia was victorious when she showed her love and unselfish fidelity. Whether the loss of Cordelia is justified aesthetically is a question that we will not answer.

With Macbeth, ambition dissolves his spiritual and moral organism. Shakespeare inspires our imagination through the storm of events and wild happenings of the external world, more than he excites our profound thinking. As in *Hamlet*, the hero rules alone; the other characters, even Lady Macbeth, are subordinate. Macbeth has the aristocratic sign of Shakespeare's heroes—inner truthfulness and disdain of self-deception. He does not shape for himself a philosophy of egoism, like Iago, but feels to the utmost the misery of a guilty conscience. He is more irresolute than premeditating, but his morals are rather those of habit and the senses than thought and will. The deed less offends his sense of right than honour. The laws of the moral world are but external boundaries to him, as to Iago and Richard III. We lack dramatic illustration of Lady Macbeth's moral decline—a decline, the importance of which corresponds with its greatness. She has been praised for unselfishness, but had she driven her husband to crime from personal ambition she would revolt us a thousand times more.

We pass over *Timon*, merely noting that Alcibiades is spoken of as a high-minded and mighty genius; and the point is made that servants are represented as honest and loyal by contrast with their weak and decadent masters—and that this is unlike the other dramas, and suggests a bitter personal experience.

Shakespeare's comedies contain improbabilities of plot and character, but they are compensated by his art—by single beauties, descriptions, and profound thoughts. He indulges his humour more against aesthetic oddity and tastelessness than errors of will or moral errors. If he lacks Molière's sharp 'social' intellect, he knows better the eternal secrets of nature and the human heart.

His faults in the *Errors* are the splendid ones of overflowing vigour; but he preserves a firm and manly point of view through the most exuberant scenes. *Verona* is a light sketch, dependent on single

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Rötcher, Ulrici, Gervinus.

beauties: a lightly treated composition, with psychological contradictions, but rare artistic knowledge of the human heart. Proteus is a pleasure-lover, the product of aesthetic half-education, which hopes to satisfy the intellect with subtle sophistries, and calm the heart with sentiments. According to these principles, all that pleases one is allowed. Contrary to Shakespeare's mode, the centre of gravity of *M.N.D.* is not based in the laws of reason and influence of human feelings. Tragic motives dissolve into gaiety, emotion loses its force, grief its thorn, pity its moving power. Shakespeare ennobled and beautified the characters which he borrowed from popular legend. Untouched by the fatal division between good and evil, sense for the beautiful is for them what passion is for the mortal. Jealousy is the one passion which disturbs the innocent play of their world. The theme may lack depth and the plot fascinating complications, but Shakespeare compensates by wealth of poetic colour and magic power of expression, such as is hardly to be found again throughout his works.

We now reach the second group, where even the most unrestrained moods of the clowns are fundamentally dictated by a poetic idea which organically supports the whole play. Superficially piquant, to the careful reader they are morally and mentally stimulating. Shakespeare never forgoes his superior freedom for the sake of moral purpose, nor misplaces the centre of gravity for personal inclinations, nor to flatter the public.

*L.L.L.* reminds us of *Lyly*—but Shakespeare intends this, and he follows *Lyly* with burlesque exaggeration. It is a great advance upon the earlier comedies, and the powerful, underlying theme gives to the apparently useless word-battles, and scenes without plot, the fullest interest of a drama developing with power and necessity. Conceited pedantry is contrasted with simple natural-mindedness, and pursued through all degrees of education and society. The advantage of romantic, aesthetic education is shown, but also the disadvantage. A simple English folk-song characteristically concludes, and promotes harmony and reconciliation.<sup>1</sup> The theme of the *Shrew* is the proportion of power between man and woman. The normal connexion is disturbed, and Shakespeare moves our sympathy through a surprising reconstruction of the normal state. The characters tend to caricature, but poetical exaggeration becomes the motive force of the effect—and we do not lose the fundamental idea even in the most riotous scenes. Katharine's weak spot is that she burns to be loved or courted. Petruchio, like all Shakespeare's humorous characters, has the alloy of a rough healthy egoism. *All's Well* makes us aware of Shakespeare's hatred for affectations, and brings us near the pith of Shakespeare's perception of life. The problem was to make Helena's victory intelligible.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Noble.

Bertram is an ardent, masculine being, who desires not peace, but effort and danger. It is revolting for such a man to have forced on him a partner for life. The conversion is too sudden to make us accept the happy end, but Shakespeare has successfully solved the problem of Helena's part. He stresses her character and intelligence more than her beauty. The critical scenes show her, before our eyes, developing into a perfect woman, among the best created by Shakespeare. She needed her severe trials to efface the lingering prejudices against a woman who pursues a man.

The characters of *M. Ado* form a society in which serious conflicts are not to be expected. The villain, for instance, has become embittered by selfishness against all cheerful people. He excites the suspicion of all reasonable men, and thus from the beginning his intrigues are doomed to failure: and from this fact the comedy derives much good. We may regret that Shakespeare has not further developed this trait, because the connexion between cause and effect would thereby gain; and even the splendid drawing of the principal characters does not carry us entirely over every doubt. Claudio is masterfully portrayed—wanton, timid, liable to quickly changing moods—so that he may seem a questionable comedy hero. But Shakespeare had to indicate these peculiar features to make the entanglement plausible; and his art is the more admirable that he softens the painful total impression. Benedict and Beatrice stand out like two superior figures from the spoilt and enervated society. Shakespeare withdraws the actions of the characters of *A.Y.L.*, and their surroundings, from the laws of prosaic consistency to effect greater freedom of poetic mood. He satirizes the unnatural aristocratic world, and creates by the side of it another one, fresh and natural. He makes real the conventional shepherd, and so gets the right tone of this free existence, impossible to the idealized Spanish, Italian, and French shepherds. Jaques is in truth a good-natured misanthropist; he is melancholy because satiated—an example of Shakespeare's warning against seeking pleasure and education. Orlando and Rosalind are the two splendid figures through whose actions and chances the interest of life is brought into the rich scenery. *Twelfth-Night* is Shakespeare's most serene and well-wrought comedy—a masterful picture of human weakness with nothing to offend or pain—transparent as a flawless brilliant. Through an extraordinary wealth of character we become aware of the inner element of the plot; and all errors are finally dispelled by the victory of strong and true love in brave and healthy natures. Through Malvolio Shakespeare strikes at the Puritans, but he never breaks the law of dramatic art by extending his satire further than the serene nature of the comedy could bear. Viola is idealized, yet wonderfully true and natural; and she so commands our interest that we care little whether or not the events are plausible. The popular songs shed harmony over the play, and minister

to its delightful total impression.<sup>1</sup> The *Wives* is an exceptionally large and broad comedy. In *A.Y.L.* we saw contrasted morbid fantastic sentimentality and healthy youthful love. The higher motive in the *Wives* almost disappears—if we compare the parts of a Viola or an Anne Page. But we see, as in bright Dutch colours, love profanely invaded—and the invader punished.

*T. and C.* is a mixture of history, tragedy, and comedy. The trend of its richly constructed plot never makes us believe it was Shakespeare's intention to stir up our sympathy through pity and fear, and leave us resigned to the world's discords. In the centre is a love-story, loosely connected with a double suite of events in the spheres of ambition, vanity, and statecraft. For the first time in Shakespeare, sensuality is gracefully veiled; and Cressida becomes fascinating by her intelligent and refined and conscious charm and glowing youth. This accomplished description of triumphant coquetry makes the bitter satire grow from scene to scene. Greek and Trojan heroes are treated with cunningly bitter sarcasm. Ulysses is the most richly endowed and interesting; and he is evidently the medium of Shakespeare's own conception—a refined and perfect judge of human nature. The time when the play was written coincided with Shakespeare's own state of deep dejection. It seems to embody the truth that all is vanity—a one-sided and discomfiting truth, but one which it is legitimate to express when done—as it is here—with logical accuracy.

Shylock is unique in Shakespeare for combining powerfully tragedy and comedy. The stories are all improbable, but after a time nothing astonishes us in this peculiar world. The connexion between Portia and Bassanio is the only one of the three plots that helps the drama to advance. Shylock's whole appearance is an episode, though he promotes character-development. Portia's love is pure, strong, and unselfish—and at this point Shakespeare borrows from a fantastic fiction. But the fresh, natural details, and the deep poetic symbolism, make us forget how improbable is the fundamental idea. Portia's whole attitude in the caskets scene shows that not only our wishes and actions import, but also the kindness of circumstances. In a symbolic way we see how significant is luck in love and marriage. The path of chance is smoothed, and Portia's sane-mindedness, besides Bassanio's luck, decides their destiny. She is Shakespeare's ideal of a woman adapted for lasting happiness. Bassanio's is a specially favoured, comfortable nature, whose life is easy because he takes it easily, though not light-heartedly. The natural balance of their powers, and an inborn moral grace, lead them in the right moment along the right path. Shakespeare, no doubt with good reason, makes this master of graceful manners represent his own point of view. Compared with these two characters, the others are but rough sketches. Nerissa and Gratiano feebly render the principal

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Noble.

parts in another key; and Lorenzo and Jessica take us a step still lower. Humour becomes wantonness, and energy thoughtless freedom. Antonio is an idealist in the bustle of material life, unselfishly devoted to his friend, but, like all idealists, equally unlimited in his antipathy. It has been attempted to make a hero of Shylock, and in the first scene of Act III he does seem to rise to the height of an historical mission—to voice shrilly the outraged feelings of a hard energetic race against the fanaticism of the dominating people. But he degenerates in his talk with Tubal to the mere money-lover who would rather see his daughter dead with the jewels in her ears; and his hatred to Antonio is entirely for reasons of business. In the decisive scene, at the moment of failure, he changes from irrevocable enemy to miser. He is the typical usurer without honour or conscience; and in Shakespeare's day only Jews practised usury. We must hesitate to believe that Shakespeare took definite sides; and we do not know for certain if Shylock is a tragic or comic figure. If a moral can be drawn from the play's total impression, it is that success comes only from moderation, prudence, and serenity. It is a poem of wholesome worldly wisdom against a background of boundless idealism and hardened selfishness.

*M. for M.* is charged with the unpleasantest evaporations of human weakness, and the sins of society, but it has profound and rich value. The fundamental idea of the plot is the force and discipline of the law—and the play is more concerned with thought than action. Angelo is the man of authority, without humour, and not worthy to be classed among Shakespeare's true heroes. Isabella is the ideal of virtue, her beauty intellectualized with morality and will, and transfigured by angelic kind-heartedness—and she is unconscious of her spiritual gifts. Shakespeare translates our inmost wishes when he allows her finally to be removed from asceticism into warm life. Angelo to the end clings to the world's estimation, and like a coward wishes to die when he sees that all is lost. If the Duke is not a better man when he resumes the reins of government, he at least has more confidence in liberal principle, and dismisses the idea that the headsman is the basis of society. Mere words, or the story, stimulate our interest in *Cymbeline*, not the plot as elsewhere with Shakespeare. Yet it is a rich and magnificent poem, as we feel when we become engrossed in the character-studies of Posthumus and Imogen. The picture of her love belongs to Shakespeare's best work; and she is the pure, real woman to perfection. At the critical moment she has full power to decide, and courage to steer the right course; and this removes her from tragedy and effects a good ending. Complete independence joined to humble regard for duty absorbs the interest of the play. Shakespeare's mastery of the human mind includes its degenerate specimens. Cloten's brutality equals the wickedness of Iago and Edmund. The episode of Belarius is a complement to the character-study of Imogen: it marks the contrast



between sound manly foundation and that of woman. The wager scene offends, and Posthumus is less straight in his course than the more single-minded woman; but the cause is his greater excitability, and he undergoes the utmost penance of self-abasement. The play has dramatic faults, but its glorious aim is to display full moral freedom.

Against his usual custom Shakespeare lets his own image appear in the *Tempest*. High poetic merits combine with a correct and classical plot. The noble and kingly figure of Prospero sustains the plot practically alone. He is not exempt from the penalties of those who abandon life: for Shakespeare, despite his idealism, had his bases in reality. Caliban's intelligence alone warns him to obey Prospero—his heart is barren and dead. His prostration before Stephano, and his song ('Ban, Ban . . .') reveal Shakespeare's innermost repulsion for the revolutionary desires of the lower classes. We note that the spirits also, even Ariel, obey Prospero for his mighty will rather than for love. The *W. Tale* changes scenes of imposing beauty with light sketches. There is no tragic feeling in the air; Leontes is not a tragic figure; and Hermione seems the last person to cause jealousy. The Prince's sudden death arrests the plot tragically in order to lead it to a happy solution in another generation. In this happy ending we see the calm outlook of Shakespeare's serene age where, having attained inner and outer peace, he looks on life with kind humour. . . .

If we sift Kreyssig's pages for general remarks on Shakespeare, we find that he looks upon him as supreme poet, dramatist, religious, moral, and political teacher, and all else. When we turn to his treatment of particular plays, we doubt if there is entire correspondence between general remarks and particular instances. We suggest that Kreyssig accepted the tradition of whole-hearted Shakespeare-worship, but could not always confirm it by his own experience. He accentuates the moral side of Shakespeare—and this is the cause of his defects. He tells us that Lear curses Goneril in a senseless fit of temper, and forfeits our sympathy; that Tamora (*Titus*) becomes a tragic heroine because her holiest (mother's) feelings are hurt; he assigns a commonplace moral to the *Merchant*; he says that the logical end of Pistol and his friends justifies the King's repudiation; that the passion in *Othello* is bestial; that *A. and C.* lacks the grandeur of *J.C.* because there is no conflict of abstract ideals. To over-accentuate the moral interest is to diminish the aesthetic, and to judge a play by its outer events. An instance of the latter fault is the remark that Shylock is an episode. Kreyssig, however, is less insensitive than some others to Shakespeare's inner poetical meaning, and we may call his best criticism moral-aesthetic because he enters the aesthetic territory through a moral gate. He discovers that the artistic grouping of *Henry IV* emphasizes the moral idea—the relation of outward to inward honour; that Richard III incarnates a degenerate age, and, as conqueror, need not keep faith with

perjured murderers; that, though John is a usurper, it is his moral character which alienates his subjects; that soldiering in the time of Antony has become a business, and an unsuccessful leader may be deserted; that a nature like Cleopatra's is rich enough to compensate for breach of the moral law; that Coriolanus forgets the only safe basis for aristocracy—subordination of personal ambition to patriotism—and it can hardly be said that the people slander him; that Lady Macbeth would revolt us a thousand times more were she moved by personal ambition; that the caskets (*Merchant*) symbolize luck in love and marriage; that Antonio, like all idealists, is equally violent in his antipathies; that Bertram (*All's Well*) is justly angry to be forced to take a partner for life.

In all these matters moral and aesthetic are closely linked, and the critic's insight, stimulated by moral experience, extended to aesthetic.

As contrast, his views on *Hamlet* are purely intellectual and speculative, and do not touch the reader's heart. To be told that excess of education, &c., conflicts with serious duties leaves the problem untouched. We notice this more because a somewhat similar criticism on *Verona* is not altogether fruitless. Proteus becomes a little clearer as the result of aesthetic half-education, where all that pleases is allowed. That Jaques is a good-natured misanthropist is his one worthy remark about *A.Y.L.*; and it is equally well said that the Shrew burns to be loved; and that Viola (*Twelfth-Night*) is idealized, yet wonderfully true and natural. We are startled to hear that Claudio (*M. Ado*) is masterfully drawn; and that Isabella (*M. for M.*) is unconscious of her virtue. To Kreyssig, as to others of a more confident critical age than our own, Shakespeare's personality is no insoluble mystery. He credits him with definite opinions on religion, morals, politics; it appears to him that Bassanio represents Shakespeare's point of view; and that *T. and C.* mirrors Shakespeare's own state of dejection.

## V

CARL ROHRBACH<sup>1</sup> disputes Hamlet's courage in following the Ghost, since his friends had already found it harmless. Then, instead of feigning madness with his uncle or mother, he practises on the innocent Ophelia. This is cowardly; and his inflated speech over her grave costs only a little breath—but words are his element. If 'To be . . .' is superior to his other monologues, it is because it is general and contains nothing personal: though we do gain further insight into his character—that he fears death, and the Unknown. His thought is deep and clear, and he shows extraordinary knowledge of his own situation. He first exonerates himself, and then weakens his justification by declaring it to be only a cloak for cowardice. Great importance has been attached to the soliloquy, because it starts with a conundrum

<sup>1</sup> *Sh.'s Hamlet Explained*, 1859.

that sounds interesting, but many do not know the special meaning of the words. Interest in the monologue decreases considerably towards the end.

Hamlet's feigned madness is not prudent because it draws upon him the attention of the whole court.<sup>1</sup> It would help to excuse him should he kill his uncle; but he also makes it an excuse to give his tongue free play—and he prefers words to deeds. Were he a man, not a weakling, and resolved to do his work, he would keep silent on the chief matter. Why does he declare his thoughts from time to time against the King (through the play) and his mother? Why confide in Horatio who could not help? Why feign madness and then let Rosencrantz and Guildenstern know that he is not mad?

Instead of killing the King at prayer, and leaving what lies beyond the grave to the Eternal, he prefers to philosophize. When he hears a voice behind the arras he feigns madness again, lest he should be held responsible, and kills by blind chance. This was indeed heroic—and when he discovers it is Polonius he can only mock the innocent old man. Having committed a murder he resumes his favourite business of making speeches, and reads a lecture to his mother. When the Ghost reappears he can only crawl. A cause which would animate stones can draw nothing from him but tears. He does not see that the Ghost appears to remind him that *now* is the time to act, as his departure is fixed for next day. His soliloquy at the sight of Fortinbras is distinguished by its perfect repose, and shows him to be a coward. He recalls that for the sake of both parents he must revenge, and then, instead of returning sword in hand back to court, takes ship for England, his thoughts cheered, to seek for blood. It is always his head, and only his head, that is active.

He is a good philosopher, who can speak well, and knows and can control himself—though he does not always do so—but lacks self-confidence and courage, and shrinks back from anything to be done, especially in the light of day. He delights in night and privacy; he is without love and gratitude to Ophelia, and betrays his feelings with coarseness. He is cruel and vindictive to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, and childishly silly at Ophelia's grave. Laertes' emphasis had nothing to do with him, as he was unseen. He is a weakling, the true son of his wordy father and weak mother—without ambition or he would not have allowed the crown to slip so easily to his uncle—with no desire for fame, but envious of that of others. When Ophelia praises him she leaves out the heart and says nothing of his courage. Perhaps Denmark had nothing better to show—Fortinbras is a Norwegian—and in a field of stinging-nettles a single thistle is a distinguished object.

The Ghost was about to speak when the cock crew—but both father and son are always too late. Perhaps the Ghost's vanity was offended

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Ludwig.

because Horatio and his friend do not take him for a real ghost; or his royal blood was upset to think that he was taken for an ordinary man under a ghost, until Horatio spoke of *his* country and so acknowledged him king. Then he lifted his head to speak—too late. If Hamlet is composed enough after such a startling communication to write down general remarks on his tables, he cannot have been deeply impressed. The Ghost appears again during Hamlet's interview with his mother: but why did it not appear sooner when he was watching his uncle at prayer? Too late as usual: and it is delightful to follow Shakespeare weaving his web so finely.

Why does Hamlet, after the ghost-interview, only partially gratify his friends' curiosity? Then he swears them to silence—because, conscious that he himself cannot keep an oath, he does not trust a simple promise. The Ghost below repeats the warning, and its presence is already disagreeable to him, for he knows that the intention to obey is growing weak. Then comes the idea to feign madness, and again he makes his friends promise not to betray. This is foolish, as it would have been simpler and easier to have kept the intention to himself, and also to have carried it out. But his heart, the vessel of his intention, is small, and soon runs over in words.

As the play proceeds we notice that Polonius spies on his son with the help of a servant; the King and Queen spy on Hamlet with the help of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern and also of Ophelia; Hamlet and his mother in like manner are spied upon; and Hamlet spies on the King with the help of Horatio. Shakespeare designs to show that all the Danish court-people resemble one another. . . .

It is needless to say that the critic who treats *Hamlet* as a record of facts, instead of looking at it through the veil of poetry, is wrong from beginning to end; and yet the essay has an inverse interest to its writer's intention. It shows the poor foundation on which Shakespeare built his tower that eventually reached the heavens, and is an unknowing witness to the truth of modern criticism that the mystery of *Hamlet* lies in the gulf between the old barbaric story and the newly conceived character of the hero. Rohrbach cannot appreciate Hamlet himself, but one of his remarks makes us pause: that instead of returning sword in hand to court, he sets out for England cheered by his own soliloquy. Eminent critics, including Professor Bradley, have found Shakespeare's self in Hamlet; does this indirectly help to prove that even Shakespeare may have had the artist's weakness of mistaking words for things?

## VI

KARL WERDER<sup>1</sup> propounds a theory of *Hamlet* at which previous critics have already hinted.<sup>2</sup> He complains that all the critics support

<sup>1</sup> *The Heart of Hamlet's Mystery*, 1859-60 (trans. E. Wilder. N.Y., Putnam, 1907).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Klein and Ulrici.

the subjective theory, but the reason why Hamlet cannot kill the King is objective. Is he to justify his action by the Ghost's words? He would have been regarded as a shameless criminal, intent on his own ambitions; and the people would be furious with him for thinking them foolish enough to believe his story. His business is to make the King confess, to unmask and convict him; truth and justice can come to light only from the mouth of the crowned criminal. If Hamlet had summarily killed the King the result would be that people would disbelieve in the apparition, and frustrate its intentions. No punishment can be real unless the offender be condemned by the unanimous verdict of his world. Hamlet, therefore, must hope that both himself and the King will live until the time is ripe for the truth to be disclosed, and in this hope he must do what he can to protect and preserve his own life.

The basis of the play is an abyss of outrage which covers the darkest of secrets. Hamlet has lost his father whom he loved and revered—and, in a different way, his mother who proved unworthy. The Ghost is moved by the criminal disruption of the family, not the State or the government. What weighs on Hamlet's soul is the shame and horror of his misery. The Queen's sensual passion is the black spot of his inner life: this is the source of the evil that she has brought upon the royal house. It is the basis of Hamlet's talk with Ophelia, and the prelude to his pleading with his mother. That the court does not censure his mother's haste in remarrying increases his shame. The reproach is objective, not subjective, and neither Hamlet nor the Ghost are jealous. The society must be degenerate that readily complies with every royal whim. The idea that no political motive, but inward personal prompting, urged his mother to remarry pierces Hamlet's soul and weighs him down in mourning. His father's death, his disgust with his mother, and his relations with his antipathetic uncle are the threefold terrible facts.

We do not know how the rotten state of Denmark came to be. Was the elder Hamlet the solitary pillar of his country? Neither do we know where are his generals and counsellors, or whether the present court was his court. It may be that during his later years, when he renounced conquest, the baser elements rose to the surface. However, Shakespeare makes us see that the detestable conditions are the reverse of the past. The first soliloquy, 'O that this too, too solid flesh . . .', expresses the situation in a simple, natural, healthy manner. The reality, not something imaginary, weighs upon him, the key to the soliloquy is the secret torment in himself. There is something in him, dark, voiceless, undefined, not to be banished. He inhales the atmosphere of murder, he has a shuddering sense of the Ghost hovering near. But Shakespeare shows clearly that Hamlet is indisputably and humanly healthy. As yet he only feels the presence of an unholy secret; but to the audience the objective truth is open. The soliloquy gives again the

substance of the first scene, but as inner action, fighting inwardly against the darkness. What we saw in the appearance of the Ghost and amazement of the soldiers, we now hear in Hamlet's tortured lonely unrest—the more despairing because he cannot understand the object and reason of the torture. Then he learns of the Ghost, and at once all is clear, having pre-existed as formless material in his inner consciousness.

On one side is a well-defended fortress, on the other a single man. The King is formidable and has gained a strong position. The task is certainly not to be achieved by force, and hardly by cunning. So terrible and monstrous a dilemma may well cost a man the loss of his understanding. Hamlet's impulse to feign madness is the direct outcome of his full sense of the situation. Upon a sane mind is laid what is enough to destroy it, and indeed does destroy all except the mind and its will and freedom—since he knows that all his happiness and peace is destroyed by this situation—and that the demon of his task threatens the last thing left him—his mind itself. All he can do is to express his condition, and the instinctive impulse succeeds as a purpose: it gives a vent to what rages in him, and also diverts attention from the true cause of his trouble. Yet the mask is loosely worn and transparent; it hides his secret, not himself, and therefore soon ceases to serve. When the first opportunity for action comes, through the play, the King knows that his madness was not real. The need to enlighten his mother is more pressing than to kill the King. That this action should be introduced by others, not Hamlet—by Polonius, with the Ghost intervening to help all on—this impresses the scene powerfully, and makes it the turning-point of the whole action. The death of Polonius changes all, and the seriousness of Hamlet's fate is more to him than the wish and care for his mask. He does not make his first trial of assumed madness with his friends, after seeing the Ghost. It would have been absurd to stand distracted before trusted friends and say that he *will* become so! Horatio and Marcellus have seen the Ghost, and, above all, they must be silent. The Prince would therefore less desire to make them believe him mad; for they would be more prone to speak of the whole affair in high places. If he represented himself as mad he would indeed be insane.

Hamlet was no lover of crooked ways, but since treachery and double-dealing are all about him, he must walk warily. He must outwit cunning, and his brain is his only weapon. When a man like Claudius reigns with the consent of the realm, the State is in decadence. It is no sign of weakness that he needed real proof. The words, 'Out of my weakness and my melancholy . . .', do not express indecision or illustrate his weak will, but delimit the objective from the subjective. The real meaning is that all he knows is what a ghost has told him. The Ghost is real, and no mere reflection of Hamlet's inner self. The motive

must come from a living person, and, according to the law of tragedy, only from the criminal. Hamlet knows that all depends upon confession. The soliloquy, 'O what a rogue . . .', has been wrongly interpreted. It expresses righteous indignation turning against itself because it cannot reach its object, and venting its wrath at the impossibility of action by self-reproach and self-depreciation. He is forced to be what he is, he must be silent and only work indirectly. Because he restrains himself he has to suffer, for it would be easy to kill the King, and sacrifice his own life—but this would not be to accomplish truly. His strong will enables him to endure this torture in the fear and reverence of his sacred duty. But he would not be able to hold out unless he gave vent to his feelings in his soliloquies.

Conscience is not the real motive of the 'To be' soliloquy—at least, not in the moral sense. The soliloquy is pure reflection: reflection alone operates and decides. That which makes man, and which conscience lays hold of, is the core of the soliloquy, not conscience in the ordinary sense. One forgets how much the absence of colouring comes from the situation of the speaker. He calls himself 'coward' because he cannot do what he ought to do; and man's privilege and highest right he calls 'fear'. His soul is dominated by the thought that our sorrow and need spring from that which ennobles us. The special idea is that thought and reflection arrest immediate impulse and blind pressure of desire.

He obtains the King's acknowledgement of guilt, but as pantomime only, not spoken confession. The King can escape because he is king, with the whole court behind him. All have noticed the play's meaning, but they see only the King's displeasure and Hamlet's revolt. They will not wish to see what may be suspected, since suspicion against royalty is a crime. We thus see how little hold Hamlet has on his world; for these are the people who would be his jury. When the King prays we see progress in his part, from the negative side—wisdom in the rhythm of the development. Hamlet would defeat his purpose if he now made the King dumb before the world after extorting the pantomime of a confession. It has been said that Hamlet deceives himself when he gives his reasons for sparing the King: but the critics are blind. The King at last falls in such a way that every other would be more lenient. He falls in the act of doing what places him beyond all hope of salvation. He is about to commit a threefold murder, and he even lets his wife drink the poison. This was Shakespeare's idea of vengeance, punishment, judgement. It was a grave error to kill Polonius—and it is the turning-point of the play, including in itself the second cardinal moment for understanding the whole. Only here do we gain insight into the tragic depth of the drama, into the plot. To understand it is to understand Hamlet: he commits an error, and the error is Hamlet. To stab at the tapestry expresses his blind passion;

he has become a criminal—though for his cause—and the error punishes itself. For once he has forgotten his true duty, but the failure brings him to his senses. Through rage he might have ruined his cause; but he needs double caution, and therefore submits to be sent to England. He sees the army of Fortinbras and envies him: he revolts at his task, not at himself. He would like to unite reason and passion; but the instinct of his reason rises against the spirit of his revenge, and that instinct respects this spirit and therefore revolts. He hesitates whether to strike the blow, even if it ruin his cause: but this is no cowardly complaining temper. The background of this horrible doubt is remorse for his error.

Hamlet has been blamed for his conduct to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern: but if the letter is delivered he dies. It has been said that he might have substituted a letter which would endanger neither them nor himself. He does not know how far they were aware of the King's purpose, or whether they were not also bearers of some oral message. They might contradict his letter; the King of England might suspect, and hold the three fast till he could get news from Denmark. Neither here nor at any point in Hamlet's destiny can there be another course. They fall as a sacrifice to the King; they have served the King against the Prince, and it is their guilt. They know the letter contains nothing good for Hamlet; they undertake the business willingly; and they are short-sighted and careless because all they seek is the King's favour. Men should reckon with risks, and they perish justly because they serve the murderer against Hamlet who acts in the cause of justice. There is no higher reason than that of real tragedy. Fate does not let them return like Hamlet; because of their connexion with the King they are caught in the web of destiny.

Hamlet's relations with Ophelia have been misunderstood. At the Ghost's bidding he must surrender all happiness, and she was not fitted to be his confidante. Everything is taken from him, every hope, comfort, possibility of a favourable issue. Even Horatio can give no positive help; but he is isolated with his inward pain, and torn from all former associations. He ought to do and must desire to do what no one can do: this is his tragic destiny and it parts him from Ophelia. He expresses himself as he does in the nunnery scene to quench any lurking hope; but he dares not tell her for the true reason. He outdoes Laertes at the grave not in order to outdo him, but from despair at Ophelia's fate. She goes mad because the breath of the grave and of murder is about her: the same that prevails through the whole action. Laertes lets himself be ensnared into villainy because he cannot see into the King's character. This is the picture of 'energy' that Shakespeare contrasts with Hamlet's inaction!

All tragedy is a promulgation of justice, and the crime of *Hamlet* calls for divine justice because human power is impotent. We see that



destiny and the progress of the action spring from God. With spiritual help Hamlet solves the problem, and the criminal is baited to his destruction by chances of an inscrutable nature. Shakespeare has delineated this sinner with masterly power—paltry by nature but terrible in his activity, small in himself but great in deed, repugnant as a person but interesting for his career and end. All he fears is to be deprived of his enjoyment; ideals and morality are for him mere theory. Outwardly he is imposing, also resourceful and invincible by position. He is so tenacious in his egotism that even his wife's fate does not make him lose his perfect self-control or prevent him striving for personal security. He is unassailable in worldly dignity, in his gift of hypocrisy, and the depth of his criminality. It is a gross error to think that Hamlet should do anything against him corporeally and ignore his personality. In no tragedy is the criminal killed without evidence; and the cardinal point in *Hamlet* is the difficulty of producing evidence. The criminal must be brought to make himself assailable: and he does it by the fencing match. Laertes, his would-be tool, proves his evil angel who gives to the world complete evidence of the King's guilt. There are two movements in the play, but the persons who make them do not understand or control the action. What Hamlet did against himself becomes active for good in the hands of those powers. The most decisive event is Polonius's death; it is the secretest point in Hamlet's fate-guided course, the most hidden from himself. It is the most brilliant feature in Shakespeare's invention—the thing inwardly accomplished, but outwardly apparent only in the catastrophe. On this account Hamlet falls, but his task is fulfilled. The King does not confess, but tells a lie in death; but Laertes has spoken, also the Queen's corpse and Hamlet's blood; and now Horatio's story will convince. . . .

Werder is a powerful writer, with knowledge of life and a broad outlook, and his treatise is interesting, though its main argument must be disputed. Like other German critics he is over-concerned with the outer world, but he does not equally neglect the imaginative world. He has experienced *Hamlet* spiritually—he has known its atmosphere of murder and the grave inhaled alike by Hamlet and Ophelia; but there is a gap between his feelings and their outward expression. The spell is broken, and his inmost thought reaches us in chance breaths and suggestions rather than a continuous flow. He has certainly realized that outer world in which Hamlet was fated to work: he asks truly how it came to be rotten, and where are its former men of affairs; and he enters into all the chances of the Rosencrantz-Guildenstern mission. This strong grasp of fact helps the reader and also illustrates his method. He argues backward from the real world to the imaginative, but he excels most earth-bound critics in that he thrusts far enough into space to see the lights of the heavenly city. What he tells us about the King, Polonius, Laertes does help us to conceive

them, though he starts from their material setting—and his best things are of the nature of afterthoughts. There is nothing in the play to warrant his theory that Hamlet's difficulties were external; and therefore the rhythm between the critic and his subject is imperfect, but it is not lost. He is one who starting from a right centre has taken the wrong road of a fixed idea, but is at times visited and encouraged by his better angel.

## VII

FRIEDRICH THEODOR VISCHER<sup>1</sup> derives Hamlet's procrastination from excess of contemplative habit of mind. The actual subject of the tragedy is not the man, but the invariable laws of nature which prepare for him his fate. Critics have overlooked this because the hero is so absorbing a character that the interest becomes subjective. Nowhere else is Shakespeare so mysterious, has said so much, and concealed so much. Goethe's estimate is only half-correct; he represents Hamlet as too simple, too beautiful, lacking nervous energy. A light, cheerful, and quickly responsive nature would not change at the first hard experience into one that is sombre, dead, moody, thinking only of suicide. Every trait before and after the Ghost points to the born victim of melancholy. No temperament is wholly unmixed, but melancholy is his most steadfast characteristic. Shakespeare has put more of himself into this character than any other, but he was perfectly aware of what was distempered in these broodings, and he showed it plainly in the course of a tragedy whose melancholy so resisted the demands of reason and reality. Hamlet's reflections are to be taken pathologically; they are morbid, untrue, perverted lines of thought. Alexander's dust is nothing to us, and it is only repugnant to torment our imagination with what becomes of it. Shakespeare knew that true wisdom is not in *memento mori*, but in *memento vivere*.

However, temperament is not the whole man. Hamlet nourishes his melancholy, and this brings us to will as the kernel of character. Hamlet is an idealist, who misses the actual in the dream of the perfect, and cannot reconcile the two. Above all he is genuine, and has the self-knowledge that is severe with itself. He lives in a bad world—one of false show and make-believe refinement joined to barbarous customs, from which spring foul deeds and murder. Rightly he scorns such a world, and since it was his world he naturally extends his abhorrence over the whole world.

The crucial question is what held him back from accomplishing his purpose. We misunderstand the whole play if we ignore that blood-revenge throughout is considered a sacred duty. Goethe and other critics have dwelt on the idea of idealistic humanity, the over-sensitive

<sup>1</sup> *Kritische Gänge*, 1860.

purity of the moral feeling. But moral reflections might go on for ever, because such a deed cannot but be associated with passion and violence. In his monologue there is no great magnanimity or tender conscientiousness, but he accuses himself of lack of passion, timid doubt, too careful considerations of the issue. Irresolution and conscientiousness are different things. If it was right to hesitate at first from a moral motive and idea of justice, the fault was that the moral reflection lasted too long, and general irresolution displaces moral considerations. For his own sake he may have desired that the sword of justice rather than revenge should fall, and this justice should be publicly recognized. The murder had been done in secret, and it would be difficult to collect proofs, but less difficult than to do as he does, and pretend madness. His doubt about the appearance and speech of the Ghost is a psychological difficulty; and Shakespeare must have purposely left it in a doubtful light. Would Hamlet's philosophic mind have been swayed by fear that the Ghost might be an evil spirit? Does he not rather use this as a cloak for his hesitation? He gets proof from the play but does nothing; he exults, but the triumph is psychological, not practical. Morally he might go on for ever, reflecting on further proofs, and rejecting this still as insufficient; but he does not reflect upon it, and so has nothing to reject. Therefore it is not a moral motive, but general irresolution.

His speech when he finds the King at prayer does not show moral idealism; but he is excusing himself for failing to make up his mind. We may allow it to be possible that Shakespeare intended Hamlet should say to himself that there was not yet proof enough, the fresh overpowering proof must be brought forward, and then the criminal be openly attacked: although probably it was the result of the vague general spirit of hesitation. If the moral motive is justified up to this moment, from this moment when he finds the King praying he does nothing, and is the victim alone of morbid reflection. If the idea still floats before him of some further evidence, he remains passive and makes no effort to obtain it.

Probably he wished to create a world out of the elements of thought and to be free to manage the task imposed upon him. A certain proud obstinacy may also have made him scorn to be led by chance or depend on the hour. It is allied to the spirit that has nothing to do with beautiful and lofty, or ugly and low—a complication of powers that disinclines to action. This complication makes him unhappy, for his will and feeling strive towards action. Melancholy and brooding are only the outer shell of a forceful, manly kernel; inwardly he struggles with all his might to act, but cannot find wherein exactly the malady lies that is the cause of his inaction. He is not the weakling of Goethe's conception, but morally severe, keen-sighted, well-knit, and profoundly thoughtful. Shakespeare has boldly made this vacillating figure the

hero of a drama. He endows his hero with all the fire and force compatible with his lingering gait. Closely observed, you detect a hot violent nature, giving vent to itself in fierce outbreaks, harsh, at times in frenzy, even malicious—a volcano that erupts inwardly, not outwardly.

He certainly does not lack 'nervous energy', and we know from Ophelia's words and his own deeds that he has courage. He has not the inborn courage of the cool-blooded man, but his is the intellectual, nervous nature that requires to be excited, and the imagination set on fire. Also we cannot affirm that no lack of courage has to do with his hesitation—for the bravery of nervous natures fluctuates. Another trait in this contradictory nature is hardness of speech and behaviour. He is harsh and savage after killing Polonius, and pitiless to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. He had lacked compassion from the moment that he had been charged by the Ghost. This also explains his conduct to Ophelia—although, because of his mother, he despises womanhood in general. And he also suspects that she is used against him by his enemies. He sees everything around smirched with the black of the central crime and does not understand what wounds he inflicts on the innocent. His wild outburst in the grave shows the whole power of a love cruelly hid from the living. Yet in spite of hidden softness we find in Hamlet enough harshness, pitilessness, and roughness to feel sure that his hesitation is not due to a dominating idealistic, ethic purity. We therefore return to the main question: what are his thoughts, since mere thinking prevents action?

That he thinks too much on the success and the consequences (see monologue iv. 4) betrays the nervous, over-imaginative man entangled in a net of supposed possibilities when it is a matter of a highly important and dangerous deed. He speaks of just consideration, further evidence, &c., but there is something behind that deters him from quick dispatch. The barrier was excess of supposition as to possible failure—one-quarter wisdom to three-quarters cowardice. At bottom it is not fear; of this he over-accuses himself as if to goad himself to action by the reproach of cowardice. If the issue is what he dwells on, and fear is not the cause but the outcome, it is indifferent whether thought refers to the issue or whatsoever else. We must take the whole man and note how he dissects everything, inquires subtly into everything, splits hairs, looks through others, and is always conscious of himself—and we need not inquire into *what* he thinks. He just thinks too much, and thinks beyond the point where he should stop; it is superabundant thought that includes everything possible, and goes round and round everything.

Thought alone never leads to action, but goes on in an endless line. When a matter is fully thought out, there remains to seize the right moment. A moment comes which seems the fittest: but who can say

one fitter may not come? The idea of the fit is relative, but thought seeks the absolutely fit moment which does not exist. The *now* is terrible to the man given over to thought; the true man of action boldly seizes the *now*, and takes his stand on the knife-like edge of the instant. Transition from thought to action is irrational—the snap of an endless chain. What makes the sudden action possible is another power than thought, but linked with it, that acts instinctively and questions no longer. Here is the fit moment—then seize it by the forelock: if it miscarry, what then? As far as one could humanly discern it seemed the fittest. Hamlet knows that he lacks this force and accuses himself of dullness, &c.—but it is thought that obstructs his nature. When the necessary thinking is achieved, thought is not extinguished in the force which is to actualize it. We call this force instinct or even passion, but at bottom it is nature in the mind—the natural force of the mind.

Hamlet lacks a power at the core of his being, and when the supreme call comes his nature is stultified and caught in a network of thought. He cannot make thought and instinct act together, and he commits the error of feigning madness which draws attention to him. He should have appeared free and careless; and there must have been a deeper reason why he failed to see how injudicious was his action. He is crafty and not unpractical, but he really needs less craft than he thinks. He prefers working out plans of action rather than action itself. His design of the play succeeds, but comes to naught. When the King left hurriedly, there was his opportunity, and he fails again when he sees the King at prayer. Yet his strength lies in his weakness—for the prodigious ethical force of his speech awakens conscience in his mother. And in his impassioned mood he does attain action—though he kills the wrong man. It is true to life that one who over-thinks should act indiscreetly.

Yet he has an excuse: it is that something warns him he has but to wait, and the King who committed the first crime may commit another to make the first more probable. He has now killed Polonius and caused Ophelia's death, and so roused revenge in others. The King knows he is dangerous; and the people suspect that he knew of a crime and its perpetrator but killed the wrong man. Hence the silent funeral of Polonius, and Hamlet's dispatch to England. Hamlet submits because morbid reflection holds him passive; and also, as we see from his last words to his mother, he is revolving some further plan and can afford the extra time. Meanwhile the revolution of events is doubling the tragedy, and the King and Laertes (Hamlet's contrast) have joined hands. Hamlet sees that he has injured a family, and forced another to do what he should have done to the King; but he does not go so far as clearly to discern the full extent of the injury; nor how callous his inner distemper has made him to the suffering of

others; nor does he think that the King and Laertes will act quickly; but he suspects treachery.

Hamlet is above all ironical, but he is conscious of the flaw in his nature, and he is even more a humorist than ironical. But the crookedness of his own being is a burden, and so humour cannot overcome melancholy and bitter irony, but only suffices to prevent him being always bitter. Men often speak humorously of serious things, but with Hamlet the passage from grave to gay is so rapid that it gives the impression of madness. He is conscious of a feeling of disharmony within, which seeks and expresses itself in such unbridged passages. We have now found his positive reason for assuming the mask of madness; but it is less a means to an end than an object to please himself. It is his taste to play the fool, a pleasure in itself; and he delights in the theatre and the society of actors. Under his mask he can deride the courtiers and give free play to his wit, and parody the consciousness of his own madness. He is not more mad than all men of genius, to whom everything is not so patently clear as to ordinary minds—nor than all profounder natures in which certain faculties are so strongly developed that the harmony of their nature is disturbed. He is aware of this and cannot alter it, and in this sense, therefore, we may say that he plays the fool because he is one.

When at last he acts it is because he is aware of a new crime against him, in the same moment that he learns he has only a few minutes to live. The knot that bound him is undone; there is no question of the horrible *Now*. It is impossible to doubt whether this is the right moment, for there is no other. To be just to Hamlet we must recognize that a man without depth may easily seize the right moment and act forthwith; but after a certain degree of depth this fortunate relation ceases. In the misfortune of men of intellect there is a tragic greatness which mingles reverence with pity. French and English laugh at irresolute Germans, and Hamlet is rightly called a German type. The French are more light-minded and versatile, the English narrower and harder; and both suspect there is something in the Germans that they cannot fathom.

But we must again note that Hamlet is vaguely beset with the idea that he must bring the King to an open tribunal. He therefore cannot act like Laertes, but needs preparations. These should be short, and his error is that he does not undertake them, and feigns madness to gain time. It oppresses him in death that he can now throw no light on his deed: he had reckoned without speed, and pictured a court and witnesses—instead of which he is to leave a wounded name. Now one recognizes that his guiltiest moment is to let the King pass after his self-betrayal at the play. However, fate took up his cause, and though it punished him, led him to his goal—overpowering proof of former crime by fresh crime. He seems to have vaguely foreknown

this event, and his words on Providence ring true and solemnly. Already, in his speech of repentance over Polonius, he seemed to descry a purpose to reserve him for further action. Aware of his inner entanglement, he hopes for the hour that will deliver him from crippling thought, and for the circumstances that will make the final deed seem a judicial act. His words on Providence correspond with the above—and also the corsair adventure that brought him home. Shakespeare uses no subterfuge, but declares to us that man proposes, God disposes; and Hamlet dares trust that the hidden interlacing workings of shame with human will and action will obey a hidden law that will bring him to the goal.

His foreboding before the fencing bout is the product of this hidden semi-conscious chain of reasoning. This is his peculiar trait, already alluded to—his predicting spirit, that excuses, though it does not justify, his hesitation. He now feels brooding over him the decisive hour which shall release him from the long burden of inner obstruction, but shall also bring death to the doer. He is guiltily guiltless like the genuine tragic hero. The feeling at the close of the play is of sultry oppression cleared by a thunderstorm. Every great poetical work has its distinct atmosphere: that of *Hamlet* is sultriness—a brooding secret, or secrecy. It is a genuine tragedy of fate, and also one of character. All is motived from within, from the actors and especially the hero. Everything teaches that circumstances are stronger than man, the whole greater than the individual; and yet the whole of the circumstances are developed from the individuals. Because this intricate involution of man and fate is profoundly portrayed, we account *Hamlet* the most wonderful creation of Shakespeare's genius. . . .

We will allow that this is interesting criticism, but of a second-rate kind—for the reason that it does not spring from strong poetic impulse. Later we will qualify this censure, but in the meanwhile it applies to Vischer's remarks on Hamlet's superabundant thought and his assumption of madness to please himself. All this is coldly reasoned from the outer facts of the play by one who has not felt the divine touch. He argues with more imagination—and thereby helps us to realize Hamlet's position in the moral world—that reason and instinct are separate, and that 'nature in the mind' is lacking to Hamlet. But his third point—the predicting spirit which he discovers in Hamlet—is the best, and saves him from exclusive fellowship with those critics who are correct but uninspired. At last the momentum of the play as a whole has forced the door of the spirit; but even so there is something of an after-discovery in his remark, as of one who has too passively let himself be sought out by Shakespeare. The spirit of Shakespeare has appeared to him at least three times in his sleep before he will deliver its message on earth.

## VIII

ACCORDING to Ludwig Shakespeare upholds belief in free will, and he is a moral poet who makes conscience finally triumph: his world is moral, and he does not defer punishment to the next world. Kreyssig says that his view of religious questions is calm and detached—his philosophy, love of truth, hatred of falsehood; he is the poet of Protestantism who stresses conscience and will, not supernatural grace; his heroes bear their fate in themselves—there is no appeal from the laws of nature; he is a great moralist, a practical man, no star-gazing idealist. To Werder he is the greatest expounder of divine law among poets. Vischer notes his knowledge of fate, and its interplay with character.

His art is called by Tieck the highest of all—the kind that prevents us from taking notice of his lack of rule. Ludwig speaks of his extraordinary art in fusing diverse material. Kreyssig praises his profound and careful motivation, and his profound and conscious morality in plot-construction. Werder speaks of his unparalleled art, which he extends to the unfathomable, his limit being where our knowledge ends.

Ludwig and Werder are divided on the object of a drama: to Ludwig it is passion; to Werder all tragedy is the promulgation of justice. Kreyssig, as we have seen, inclines to the moral.

Shakespeare is no ascetic, in Ludwig's opinion, but teaches worldly wisdom—the kind that makes the world serviceable. Kreyssig discovers that, despite idealism and imagination, his whole being is firmly rooted in a basis of reality.

Some other single remarks of Kreyssig stand out: that he was mild and loving, a world-power, impartial, as great a statesman as poet, most sane-minded and virile of poets, free from national prejudice when his patriotism was not directly invoked. . . .

The transcendental strain that has been noted in German critics is partly absent here. We discover more preoccupation with external reactions, and also—e.g. Werder—the equally German habit of following out a theory to its logical conclusion even in aesthetic questions.



## Chapter XVIII

### GERMANY 1863-1866

I. FLATHE. II. RÖTSCHER. III. KOESTER. IV. BODENSTEDT. V. DÖRRING.  
VI. SIEVERS. VII. CONCLUSION.

#### I

**J.** L. F. FLATHE<sup>1</sup> says that Shakespeare nearly always represents men of power and determination, and therefore the Hamlet of German aesthetics has no foundation. The words of Ophelia and Fortinbras prove that he was no weak sensualist. He does not shrink from the Ghost, as do Horatio and Marcellus, and his behaviour to Claudius is not due to weak fear of danger. He is neither weak nor cowardly, nor a man of morbid conscientiousness. The words, 'conscience does make cowards . . .', have influenced commentators; but there is not a syllable about Claudius in this monologue. It is not difficult to interpret what the tragedy represents, for Shakespeare has made all clear, and the profundity of the play is not unfathomable. The characters of Shakespeare's plays, through error or crime, revolt against the world and life, against the eternal laws of existence, against Godhead. The world of the tragedies is large and grand; and *Hamlet* takes an exceptional place among them, for we get a conception of the world and life that dwells in every man's soul, and may affect his outer and inner behaviour. The core of the tragedy is that the chief actors carry within them such a more or less tragic conception. It may be a dangerously erroneous one, or a criminal outlook that refuses to recognize what is true, lasting, and divine. Their behaviour shows their views of life, they seldom express them outwardly: except Polonius who cannot abstain from recreating his crooked motives. The two chief factors in the play are Hamlet and the Polonius family. The relation between Hamlet and Polonius is emphasized; and by comparison the King and his crime and its consequences, and Hamlet's contemplated revenge, fall into the background. Long passages occur (especially in Act II) without a word of Claudius.

The two different views of life may be equally tragic. Hamlet, in his idealistic youth, had been cradled in sweet dreams—but now he is faced with ugly facts. He ceases to care for life, can see nothing good or evil in itself, destroys the clearness of his own spirit, and ceases to know himself. He fancies that he possesses the spirit of revenge, but the fact is that he is quite without it, and that he has plans in his mind which do not exist. He does not know his own inmost being, and the doubt of what it actually is holds him back from action. The ideal is shattered against the walls of reality, and the world and life have

<sup>1</sup> *Sh. in seiner Wirklichkeit*, 1863.

become nothing. Claudius's murder is nothing—and what Hamlet might do against him is equally nothing.

Before he can act he must regain spiritual and mental health: and this happens at the close of the play. To understand 'To be . . .' we must revert to his conversation with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern where he expresses the fundamental cause of his madness—the emptiness, inconsequence, and nullity of all that our weak vision can take in of man and life. His thoughts are continually moving on to the question whether there is something or nothingness in the Beyond. The monologue does not refer to the contemplated deed against Claudius. If it were not for conscience man would certainly turn to suicide; but man, though he may think or talk of 'To be or not to be', cannot actually conceive of nothingness: nor could Hamlet, however he might divine its possibility.

Polonius is ambitious for royal power and greatness, and will use Hamlet's love for Ophelia to forward his purpose. The worldly-wise take every advantage of circumstances, and their icy hearts know no pity for Hamlet's sorrow. Polonius never doubts Hamlet's love for Ophelia; and even she cares not for her lover's grief, but readily catches the purpose of her father's talk, feels that it involves no great danger, and gives a dry, hard promise to obey her father. Hamlet is forced to look on Ophelia as a traitress to the sanctity of true love. When he visits her in the scene which she describes to her father, he is touched by a ray of hope that she still feels warmly towards him. He gazes at her silently asking for love, but sees nothing responsive in her face. Polonius is pleased at his madness, and counts on the Prince's suffering at being exiled from her to bring matters to a crisis, and fulfil his proud hopes for his daughter. The next scene between Hamlet and Ophelia is after the 'To be' soliloquy. He now thinks of the Godhead and the necessity of prayer, and asks Ophelia to remember his sins in her prayers. Again we see her in an uglier light, present to carry out an artifice of her father's. But though her hopes of royal promotion become weaker, she still thinks to impress Hamlet deeply. She recalls his love and offers to return his tokens of it—but all is false from a false heart. He understands the return of his gifts as a wish to see him no more; and she becomes aware that his love belongs to a dead past, and that he knows her for what she is, with the result that he is driven mad. English critics have regarded her as a tender sweet maiden—but she is a frail creature with a tragic fate.

Laertes is not a contrast to Hamlet, and, being of a cold and calculating nature, in his hot haste to avenge his father is not moved by passion. Polonius and Ophelia chose crooked ways, but were not capable of murdering and poisoning. If any worldly advantage is to be gained, Laertes is ready for anything—and his revenge is calculated feeling about his father's death and sister's madness. Like the rest of

his family he is not concerned with unprofitable feelings; his rage is hypocritical, and he knows that Claudius's throne is unstable, and the future of the kingdom uncertain on account of Hamlet's madness. He rouses a party on pretence of righteous indignation and revenge, and his first attack on Claudius falls through when he hears that Hamlet is the murderer. To get Hamlet out of the way he readily falls in with Claudius's plan. The King fears both, and intends that Laertes should be condemned afterwards; but Laertes is blind to this and imagines that he will be able to get rid of Claudius. Hamlet sees through him, and knows that his magniloquent words at the grave are bombast.

To return to Hamlet: in the monologue about Fortinbras we find him still incapable of understanding the inner hindrance. He seeks one cause, then another, and at the close rouses himself to determine he will avenge; and in the same moment lets himself be carried without protest to England. In the fifth act his madness subsides, and he grows milder, from inner, not outer, change. An invisible power works upon him to prepare a fresh dawn of mental life. It grows clearer, and then comes full daylight when, like a flash from a cloudless heaven, he is hit by death. A horrid crime causes his death, but the highest power can use evil itself. Death came as madness vanished—with shock of the past to his idealizing nature now fully awakened—the blood of Polonius and others on his hands. A richly compassionate love saved him; the light came, but not as glaringly as to bring him this earthly misery—and this the token of reconciliation and peace awaiting him beyond.

Macbeth from the beginning thinks of nothing but murder. He is not a man of noble nature driven by fate to become a murderer. Shakespeare's view is that hell and the Devil have man so in their power that he is bound to become their victim. The Devil only visits those who incite him, and man falls from grace because he has alienated his heart from the Being to whom his love should belong. If he wilfully opens the door of his inner world to evil spirits, evil acquires vitality within him and he acts accordingly; these are the poet's often expressed ideas. We see from Banquo that man can resist the Devil; but Horn's view that Macbeth could have withstood fate but for his wife makes love the furtherer and intermediary of murder. According to other German critics Shakespeare is displaying, through Banquo and Macbeth, that the will is free and the reverse.

Art is not contradiction, but unity, certainty, clarity. The tragic characters here are set in surroundings that tend definitely neither to good nor evil. Macbeth, like most men, in the beginning, if not honest, was not dishonest. Good rather than evil is innate in us, but it must be ennobled and elevated by free will, which necessitates a struggle with evil. Macbeth was highly placed, and had every reason to follow the right path, including fine mental powers. He abjured conscience and followed evil, and his knowledge only served to torture him. He was

inclined to sensual pleasures, and now they did not seek him out, but he summoned them. He is a hypocrite, who speaks fair words to one whom he means to slay, and affects to lament over the corpse of his victim. We see no trace of a noble, heroic nature degraded by crime. He has no claim to be king, but trained and hardened by previous crime, he resolves to obtain it by murder. He takes an oath to do so as soon as time and opportunity favour, and the tragedy repeatedly refers to this oath which Macbeth has taken before it begins. But the murder of the King might lead to the scaffold, and Macbeth is therefore anxious and seeks aid and support. The Witches appear; he knows them to be infernal spirits, but he makes friends, and hopes they will secure his path, at least in this world. So the evil in him marches on to its ordained limits, and the meaning of the poetic fable and tragedy is revealed: we see unfolded a gigantic life-picture of human sin. Like others, for the sake of miserable earthly enjoyments, he casts his humanity into the dust and rebels against his true self. He is the extreme instance of a characteristic of human nature—to wander consciously in paths of error that end in destruction. No doubt he had long revolved ambitious hopes and brooded over murder; but man is a social being who requires sympathy, and he wished to confide to another his dreams of future greatness. It is only natural that his wife should have been his confidante, but all confidence is dangerous, and he would have withheld it from her had he not been sure that it would receive a ready and safe harbour.

It is not true that Lady Macbeth, more tiger than human being, seduced 'poor gallant Macbeth'. No one comes into the world a tiger, and the play shows that if Macbeth was seduced at all, it was not by his wife. She, like her husband, is self-corrupted, and therefore worse, because greater evil is needed to overpower a more natural purity. She had already committed lesser crimes, and now she exults in this as he had foreseen. She is more bent on murder than he because a woman falls lower than a man. Banquo is not blameless,<sup>1</sup> and a contrast to Macbeth, for, though he has not the colossal determination of Macbeth and his wife, he is not morally incapable of dark deeds. He will not seek sin out and bind himself by an oath to create an opportunity for crime, but neither will he turn away from a fair promise of reward. He knows that Macbeth would not shrink from a bloody deed, and had he been tolerably honest and upright, when he saw the effect on Macbeth of the Witches' salutation, and clearly discerned that he intended to make good their prophecies, he would have warned Duncan against easy security, and unconditional confidence, and counselled Macbeth in a serious, perhaps a threatening, manner. He would have held him responsible for the King's safety, and warned him that he would be suspected should the King die. But

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Friesen.

he put no obstacle in Macbeth's way, and so with both men the Witches did as they pleased. If either is seduced it is by the Witches, since Banquo interprets their words to mean that if his issue is to reign, Macbeth must for a while be king.

When Macbeth accosts the Witches it is not for the first time that he sees them, though perhaps not in their present shape. They assume various forms, and he wishes to know if they belong to a class of evil spirit with which he is familiar. The scene proves that he is acquainted with witches and others of their kind. Banquo shows his self-deceit and falsehood in eagerly questioning the Witches himself, and then warning Macbeth so as to say afterwards that he has warned him. A word from Banquo would have caused measures to be taken to make murder at night through unlocked doors impossible, but he says nothing. English commentators have absolved Banquo because of his speech to his son about the Witches' temptation in dreams, but neither waking nor dreaming can he accomplish any action to fulfil his hopes. Only the removal of Duncan and accession of Macbeth can further the cause of his offspring. The Witches require nothing more of him but inaction; and he must pretend to himself that Duncan is safe in Macbeth's castle. Yet he cannot but acknowledge that some restless anxiety keeps him awake—though he must put aside such feelings, or they would compel him to keep watch on Duncan's room. In sleep the mind is less controlled, and he therefore denounces as 'cursed thoughts' his suspicions of Macbeth that may come in dreams. The Porter who speaks of traitors and equivocators is not hinting at Jesuits, as some have said, but at Banquo. Lady Macbeth's swoon is genuine, for with her the crime was a momentary intoxication. Now it is over the deed becomes horribly distinct, and she swoons. She knows that the wisdom which spurned reflection is nothing, and though divine sorrow has not yet touched her it is near. She will at least try to keep firmly in the path, but as events progress even this desire grows weaker.

Flathe disagrees with former critics of *R. and J.*, especially Ulrici—and with Horn's idea of a world that cannot abide human happiness and so brings everything to an end. A drama without passion cannot exist, for it treats of mobile, not immobile, life. Passion in itself has a certain poetic value: on one side the beauty, fullness, and power of the human, and on the other the height of blind rapture to which it can attain. Shakespeare in *R. and J.* portrays the magic power of feeling and passion. Everything that separates itself from the Divine must by necessity fall to ruins—so when man in his love, or what he calls his love, turns from the Divine, he has entered on the path of ruin. Human love should be a mingling of the spiritual and sensuous—man may err in what he calls love—and tragedy draws near, and in two diverse ways tragic error may enter into love. We see both—in *R. and J.* and *Othello*—two plays separate in manner and tone, but with unmis-

takable spiritual affinity. The love of *R. and J.* ignores the spirit, to live in the sensual only—but *Othello* is the reverse. In both these is some apostasy to true humanity and therefore to the godlike in us. In *R. and J.* the actual sin is not brought forward in the beginning, and in *Othello* takes only a subsidiary place. But where there is inborn error and evil follows, a merciful God sends deliverance, though it must be won by bitter earth-sorrow. Shakespeare is penetrated with like conceptions.

It is a fundamental point that Romeo and Juliet belong to a southern, gay, unthinking world. Those around them, as far as possible, put away all serious thought, and we are aware of a more delicate kind of sensuality that desires to enjoy all the sweet and fragrant fruits of the earth. Elsewhere Shakespeare's chief characters remember higher things, but here they escape even the Friar. Only beside the grave does the latter, unavoidably, speak of things beyond. Yet the people are not incapable of thought, and they have enough mind to fight the trouble when it comes. It is will that lacks—they do not weigh their wishes and pleasures or torment themselves with cares. They disregard consequences; they enjoy wit that gives spice to life, and at first wit plays a very considerable part. They are not ambitious, and they think only of enjoying existence; their whole life circles round what from a higher standpoint is nothing, but to them an important nothing.

Shakespeare has done what no one else has attempted: he has taken revenge for a mistaken value of life on the people he brings before us. Only an untimely word has antagonized the two houses, and no one pauses to think how this quarrel may become a dangerous conflagration, but they let matters go. German critics have erred in starting with the idea of a sanguinary feud to which Romeo and Juliet must inevitably be sacrificed. Shattering of human hearts against the iron walls of life's reality meant sorrow, not tragedy, to Shakespeare. At first we do not see much of the enmity, but in course of events it grows to be a dividing wall—a wall which they set up for themselves. Here lies the tragic with Shakespeare—that by error, sin, or both combined man weaves around himself sorrow and misfortune. When love wakes in Romeo and Juliet there is only a temporary hindrance that might have been overcome by reasonable behaviour. The atmosphere in which they grow up failed to develop their nobler side. They found life pleasant without effort, and their first feelings for each other are sensual. Pure and genuine love is unhappy in a world of strife, and they would have sought to reconcile their parents for the sake of honourable marriage. We are shown that reconciliation is not difficult; but they indulge their longing without thought of the consequences. Mercutio and Tybalt die, and Romeo is silent when he should have spoken. He had but to acknowledge his hasty marriage with a Capulet and stay the

combat, but he fears that his marriage joy might be postponed. What was a dividing wall has become such through Romeo's fault. That they hold fast to one another through the grim seriousness of death shows that they have come home to the spiritual world. Love has become ideal by God-sent earthly unhappiness. The disharmony of life disappears in the harmony of a higher existence.

With Shakespeare love and marriage only become tragic when associated with some deep-seated error. Desdemona does not understand the earthly side of love, and clings to the spiritual. The root of Othello's tragedy is his pride and egoism; he puts his small human 'I' before the All. Desdemona is almost an ideal figure, who quakes only to hear the earthly side of love spoken of, and does not understand that man's senses may lead him into sin. But she has let an evil grow in her secret heart, unperceived by her gentle nature. She has forced her own small self into the foreground, and sees herself ruler. Thus she behaves harshly to her father because she feels that she can do without his counsel and protection. His grey hairs and sorrow do not perturb her; she wishes to appear strong enough to act according to her own rules, outside the regular order of life, and to erect a lasting house of happiness. She will found her love and marriage on something spiritual and so leap over the chasm which externally divides her from the Moor. Her soul desires a protecting power of mind, but she really needs one who can understand and venerate her unsensual being. She finds a man of power, but one actually opposed to her own nature. What she calls love is admiration for his manly deeds and fame—but it is not enough for lasting married happiness. She was deceived in her belief that he was internally spiritual.

The 'I' in her rules with a certain softness; with him it is a hot hasty glow. He is naturally hard, and has lived a hardening life. His pride is gigantic—as is the pride of those who have risen by their own efforts. His own self is to him life and the world—and woe to the woman whom he might suspect of soiling his name. He had been obliged, as he rose, to preserve appearances, and Venice knew him only formal and passionless. He is neither high nor pure in the realm of spirit, and incapable of appreciating Desdemona's tenderness. Apart from sensuality he had little opportunity of becoming acquainted with pure womanhood which loves quiet and retirement. He had been at home in a homeless life, and never longed for quiet married happiness. When he marries he drags after him a shadow from his younger past—the affair with Iago's wife that wrecked Iago's faith in humanity and virtue.

Othello's first intoxication of happiness gives place to restlessness. He feels something hurtful to his pride, as if forced to realize the difference between his roughness and Desdemona's gentleness. He fears people will think there is something wrong in the background to make one like Desdemona remain faithful to him. The thought works

hideously upon him, but his pride will not let him understand its nature. True living for him means to be great and powerful and admired. Marriage with Desdemona is already a fear and anguish, though unacknowledged. He lacked the true love to watch over her and despise suspicion.

Iago uses this incongruity against the destroyer of his own house and honour. He did not suspect what was passing in Othello's breast, but makes use of the general position, with no idea of the terrible issue of his insinuations. Had Othello really loved, Iago's words would have made little impression. But self, to which he was prepared to sacrifice everything, had made him a tragic figure. He has no thought for Desdemona's spotless purity, but will triumph over her dead body, and say to the world that she has soiled his honour and he has cleansed it in blood. He wishes her to be guilty that he may slay her.

Iago says no word of her actual guilt, for there was no proof of it, but speaks of possibilities. At his slightest whisper Othello resolves that she is guilty. It is easy to call this jealousy, but jealousy arises from love, and there is no trace of the jealousy that clings to love and loyalty. He neither questions nor observes, but storms at Iago to produce proof of a crime of which no one has spoken, and overlooks certain proofs of his wife's purity. It is not artfully aroused jealousy, but self-delusion. Even at her death-bed he claims to be executing justice—whereas his motives are hideous pride and defiance. About to slay himself, he records his fame in the past. To him the world's opinion and the appearances of things were all in all. . . .

Successful criticism of poetry can only be achieved by those whose critical faculties are stimulated by their aesthetic enjoyment; and we have already expressed the opinion that this is lacking in much German criticism. As poetry itself springs from the unconscious mind, so its impressions must be sifted by the unconscious mind of the reader. The process is periodical, not consecutive, but the Germans allow of no delay. Granted that their primal impressions of Shakespeare are aesthetic, they proceed to explain them in a purely philosophical, intellectual, or practical manner, until the last link is reached in the chain of reasoning. Thus Flathe contemns the passion of Romeo and Juliet as sensual, whereas meditation could have taught him what has now become a commonplace of Shakespearian criticism, that sense can be sublimated into soul. We will once more hearken to Romeo's words to the Friar, before the marriage ceremony, to assure ourselves of it:

. . . come what sorrow can,  
It cannot countervail the exchange of joy  
That one short minute gives me in her sight;  
Do thou but close our hands with holy words,  
Then love-devouring death do what he dare;  
It is enough I may but call her mine.



In the same way he says that Romeo fears his marriage joy may be postponed if he stays to explain matters; that Macbeth had sworn a previous oath to murder Duncan; that the rage of Laertes was hypocritical and calculated. He accepts as a fact Iago's random charge against Othello and his wife; and he is at his worst on Othello, perhaps excepting the remark that his jealousy is self-delusion. But to say that the world's opinion was all in all to Othello, and to belittle his dying speech, is indeed blasphemy against the holy spirit of poetry. Lamb writes that while we read Lear's outbursts we are in his mind and sustained by its grandeur; and equally so do we relive with Othello the whole of his life as we listen to his last words.

On the subject of Banquo, however, we must take Flathe more seriously. According to Flathe he was guilty in doing nothing—he should have threatened Macbeth, and by warning Duncan made murder behind unlocked doors impossible. Here we do feel that the external is used to interpret the spiritual, and the character made more real—especially by its furthest reactions in the world of dreams, to which the self-confessed 'cursed thoughts' bear witness. But we must not forget, what Flathe always does, that Shakespeare wrote for the stage, that at times he would concentrate on the effect of a single scene, forgetful of the general effect of the play—and that his characters are individuals, not chosen examples to illustrate moral theories.

## II

H. TH. RÖTSCHER<sup>1</sup> considers Shakespeare too great an artist and too inspired with the idea of art to have any bias or end outside art itself. In a work of art earthly problems should not be referred to a world beyond; action and character must be stamped by necessity, plot and character be fully justified and self-sufficing, and no question left unanswered. From all time the conclusion of a tragedy has left nothing shifted to the beyond. Here Shakespeare is the supreme artist, solving the problem of the downfall of his characters by its necessity, without pointing to another world.<sup>2</sup> His works, especially his tragedies, are thus perfect art.

Originality is the sign manual of genius, and the greater the genius the greater the originality. The originality of men like Sophocles and Shakespeare is always associated with universality in their creations. Shakespeare perfectly unites the two; he is the most original poet of all time, and also the poet of the most universal subject-matter and universal interest.

Every dramatic work worthy to be called a work of art should have a moral idea as its inmost soul. It may be seen to triumph in the overthrow of antagonistic individuals, exterminating their one-sided

<sup>1</sup> *Sh. in seinen höchsten Character-gebilden enthält und entwickelt*, 1864.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Dowden.

interests. The deaths of Romeo and Juliet effect reconciliation—a sacrifice not too great where the welfare of the whole State is concerned. The moral idea triumphs when at the close of the tragedy the prospect opens of a new world order, as in *Hamlet* and *Lear*. It may appear in punishment—Macbeth, Richard III—the devastation that follows crime. Shakespeare has given the highest artistic expression to these three forms of the moral idea.

Coriolanus illustrates the aristocratic idea which will not recognize equal virtues in those of lower rank. He opposes the Tribunes and people with a proud, passionate sense of inherited greatness; in the zeal of the Tribunes for the right of the people he sees a threat to undermine all greatness and dignity. He has superhuman courage, and gives himself body and soul to the fatherland; its renown is his greatest pride, free from all personal vanity or boasting. His passion rises not because he is personally affected, but because he fears breach of all social order. This gives his character its immense compactness, inflexibility, defiance, when he hurls himself against the stream of those he thinks incapable of any noble virtues, or readiness to sacrifice themselves for the commonwealth. To him they are only self-seekers, usurpers, destroyers—and herein lies his guilt: he offends the human which lays claim to its rights, independent of birth. When one side of life is taken for the whole and the rest ignored there is guilt. He breaks with his own class when they yield to the people, and it accords with his standpoint that he joins the enemy. Surrender to commoners has destroyed his country for him, and he feels no further debt to it. He mistakes the worth of general humanity, and feels himself more akin to a noble Volscian than a non-patrician Roman. The cause of his downfall is the inalienable power of the simplest moral relations, the foundation of all political virtue and development, of all moral good in life. The universal Human conquers the exclusive pride of station. His enemies are beneath him in personal greatness, but they represent the higher principle which does not make moral and political virtue dependent on will. Yet the people are represented as fickle, easily led away, without nobility or power of thought. An impression of partiality for Coriolanus is conveyed, and the people serve as a foil. His inborn greatness of personality is more striking by contrast with their meaner qualities.<sup>1</sup> His speeches contain the whole man; they are the concentrated and eloquent expression of every side of his heroic character—affections, passions, mood, inner emotions, thought, understanding. He is not to be judged by the standards of ordinary men who exhibit particular feelings at particular moments. His tragedy lies in knowing that the victory of his natural feelings will be fatal to him. In yielding he reveals the magic power of that sense of reverence. To one, like himself, most open in mind, disposition, word, and action, nothing could be more

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Hazlitt.

provocative than the accusation of treachery which Aufidius flings at him. His death is the just sentence against one guilty of sacrificing his country to pride of station and heredity.

Richard III is the most perfect, grandiose villain of poetic creation—one who never loses his way in pale abstractions, but is always before us as a vital, living being. We must remember that he plays his part in no limited family circle or citizen society, but in the political arena which lifts his actions into a higher sphere. He is a product of the struggle between York and Lancaster, and every member of either family in one way or other. The whole ground is gradually undermined with crime which destroys the feeling of justice and morality. This entire demoralization he inherited, but whereas traits of character had developed in isolated individuals, in him they were united and expressed. He is embodied egotism and despotism, and with him dies the last illusion about the claim to the throne behind which former lords had concealed their self-seeking. His claim to the throne is based upon immoderate ambition; and his utter disregard of moral bounds allows him to obtain it without trouble. He recognizes his personal right alone, tramples on all other rights, and in regardless consistency uses his will and the feebleness of his opponents to conquer the throne, but he is no self-deceiver. Freed from moral restraint he also appears to be nature's instrument to carry destruction among those who in the civil turmoil had been guilty of cruelty or injustice. In one sense he is the Nemesis of the spirit of the world against those who have escaped the arm of the law. This places him on a lofty pedestal as one who annihilates the degenerated medieval State—who terminates, though by criminal means, the unholy strife—and who founds a unity in place of disrupted individual interests.

What makes him demoniac is that he has at his command the finest powers, which he uses for unprincipled egotism—also penetrating understanding, keen insight into men, constancy of mind, eloquence, and invincible courage. On the psychological side, since he is deformed and exiled from Nature, why should he obey her laws? From the outset he is at war with the moral order. His fiery, passionate nature shut out from love turns to ambition. Here he can be himself alone, and needs no other being to complete him. He desires a large field of action in which to display his power, but as means to self-satisfaction destruction is illusory, and he gains no moment of actual contentment. Isolation is the comfortless result of destructive action; and he is conscious of it even when he achieves his aim. Here he wins individual colouring, and we get a full human figure.

There is something symbolic in his deformity, something that repels yet fascinates. His speech varies from scorn and bitterness to soft words and expressions of passionate love, humility, warm friendship. We trace two phases of his development; at first he is conscious of mental

superiority, disdains moral checks, and aims at the throne as his one compensation. He takes pleasure in ruthless activity and in sweeping away obstacles; he scorns the conquered and mocks at their feebleness. He knows their general moral corruption, and he at least is consistent. Conscious that he can dissimulate and is mentally superior, he is accused of success and does not hesitate. He gathers confidence from each success, and his destructive course is a sequence of triumphs. He soars above the merely serviceable, and therefore above the standpoint of common crime, and delights in the art and effects of his performances. He never dissembles to himself, but in Mephistophelian fashion mingles humour with scorn and delight with wickedness. He is devoid of feeling, with no horror of himself after the deed, and is never taken unawares. He disdains sudden surprise attack, not wishing to steal a victory, but to get enjoyment from it: thus the scene with Anne is given distinct poetic significance. It must be all against nothing; he wins her on the spot, beside the bier of his victim. It is the extreme triumph of hypocrisy, further convincing proof of his consummate command of every feeling, even those most alien to him, as also the frivolous dispositions of those who came within his power. Only moral energy not led astray by appearance could resist such power of speech and perfect art of hypocrisy.

The second phase begins when, through hypocrisy and crime, he has swept away all obstacles and ascended the throne. He has lost his elastic activity, is only concerned to keep what he has won, and must do so by the murder of the young Princes. So far his crimes had affected those who were also guilty and who thus atoned for earlier sins, and there was therefore a positive side to them. But this crime was of a different character, and even cunning offers no compensation. Richard feels the difference obscurely and can neither enjoy scorn over his adversaries' weakness nor feel the slightest triumph of intellect. For the first time his ever-ready accomplice hesitates, and this marks the crime as diabolical. He has never before felt uneasy, almost timid, or given vent to such bitter anger as towards Buckingham. At the summit of his ambition the inner man begins to turn. Mistrust, shrinking, anger take the place of confidence, contempt, mocking disregard. For the first time he has to justify his deed as the compelled result of circumstances, and so damns it in itself. He repels the thoughts of pity, but feels it encroaching on him like an enemy. He cannot forgive Buckingham, because he himself did not know the limits of Buckingham's submission, and therefore Buckingham is in possession of his most private thoughts. The turning-point is his mother's curse, for he cannot meet it, as he did Margaret's curse, with mocking epigram. He is dumb before his mother and appears powerless and disarmed. He woos Elizabeth far otherwise than he wooed Anne, with a far stormier eloquence. He speaks like a king, appeals to her

ambition, and pleads the welfare of the country. He knows that he is beginning to fight for his existence, and makes all subserve his political aim. The situation is more anxious and absorbing, and his eloquence is no longer imaginative, but serious and well-considered. Inner unrest and ferment of spirit now increase, and he feels the supports of the throne unsteady. He knows the measure of crimes for his self-preservation to be exhausted; the power and prop of understanding has vanished, and even courageous words have an artificial tone. When the ghosts of the murdered pass before him he makes a last effort of sophistry to stifle conscience, but its several thousand tongues are too much.

Shylock adds to the individual a great racial character, and the two factors form a perfect picture. It is Judaism in its degradation, hate against persecutors, nourished by deserved or undeserved lot, with undying tenacity. He epitomizes the history, sufferings, and hatred of his race, and therefore affects us with some demon-like influence. The intellectual powers of a race denied customary activity turn to the winning of worldly goods rather than the ideal. The bond strikes us as a sort of mad humour. It would be impolitic to show any evil intent in the proposal, and he himself hardly believes in future payment in kind, but it does him good to cherish the possibility. Act III shows him in full fury, for the first time revelling to the limit in the thought of taking his revenge. He carries on a hellish catechism with himself; his whole speech is of shattering passion, and we see a being lifted above himself. In this one moment he takes satisfaction for a long suppressed sense of ignominy, and with diabolical pleasure lingers on the reiterated expression of revenge.

He is not to be judged as an ordinary moral delinquent, moved by ordinary greed, envy, hatred. The thought of his daughter, who of her own free will has eloped with one of the hated ones, grows to an inward curse. The thought of Antonio's ruin, like a ray of hope, pierces the night of despair. Christendom shall atone through him, and the scene thus becomes demoniac, and Shylock is lifted into the region of tragedy. Face to face with Antonio in the trial scene, he is no longer passionately excited, but like one conscious of his superior position. Hideous composure gives coldness to his scorn and makes his reflections cutting. Prayers, threats, and abuse are useless weapons against the bulwark of his formal right. His wish for revenge arms him against the Mercy speech; but when his claim for abstract right rebounds upon himself he can hardly believe the words he hears. At first shaken and incredulous, he subsides into the abyss of misery. Here Shakespeare has given him few words; his inner overthrow is too violent for words. It is designed that though we rejoice for Antonio, our human sympathy keeps us alive to the terrible counterstroke of Nemesis.

Lady Macbeth is one of the grandest figures in poetry, but she can only be understood by picturing the monstrous powers of an iron age. Were she transferred to another age we should cease to feel the whole truth of her personality. Shakespeare from the first so attunes our imagination that we demand such figures. But if a world where historical and legendary strive with one another is a condition of her existence, she has also an independent core of being where is reflected the eternal law of the moral spirit. Here lies the mysterious power of character-drawing: she carries us into a distinct world, and yet something universal predominates.

Her will-power equals her passionate ambition; what she broods over in imagination she has the courage to effect. She would not interest poetically if her part were confined to urging him on; she would then be only a means in the general process of the plot. But she represents, in common with Macbeth, by her action and suffering, the universal example of resistance to moral spirit and final defeat by triumphant conscience. The deed falls to the man, but she takes the whole responsibility, and her eloquence and force of inspiration cause his resolve to mature. Her ruin is simultaneously physical and spiritual: as the action shifts from psychological to historical she recedes more and more into the background. She cannot work off her feelings in combat with the world, as does Macbeth. In the sleep-walking scene we imagine torments beyond the power of direct words to convey.

Much as Falstaff has been admired, the elements of this unique character have never been fully grasped, nor the fundamental causes of his fascination explained. Sunk in sensuality and gross in form, he is yet an ideal character, the creature of a liberal, poetic, and intuitive genius—and withal, through and through a denizen of the actual world. To understand him we must set aside moral standards, and start from another outlook than the moral. He is not merely objectively comic, for, if so, he could never dominate his surroundings as he does. Situations, quarrels, and arguments do not bring his comic character into the light; but he brings in the comic situations by entering on the scene with the whole pack of his sensual pleasures and vices with intent to enhance or preserve his enjoyment. He never pretends that he is not wholly given up to these pleasures—but this is only the threshold of his nature. But self-parodying does not explain all; his life-principle is that the inner nature is more inclined to set itself free from all seriousness, passion, and feelings of life which hold men in thrall and prevent freedom of spirit.<sup>1</sup> He is the natural enemy of ideal interests and passions that rob the spirit of ease and comfort, and demands concentration that hinders true liberty of soul. Hence he annihilates with his humour honour, heroism, and public spirit. Though he feigns certain virtues and tells gigantic lies, we are not to

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Boas and Marriott.

suppose that he seriously wishes to convince his audience that he possesses such qualities. It is because he has a sense of humour that he parodies himself and also the world that lays so much weight on these qualities.

From his standpoint nothing would so much destroy his peace and freedom as death. He frees himself from the disgrace of cowardice by a humorous view of the whole situation. It awakens in us no feeling of displeasure or moral indignation. The absolute basis of his character is this freedom of spirit which makes him master of every especial feeling, and expends itself in humour. We are pleased to think that he survives when so many knightly warriors fall. Even in the dismissal scene, when he is hurled from Paradise, humour does not desert him, but overmasters every threat of disturbing feeling. There is no word of complaint, displeasure, or inward commotion. He affirms that the King assumes a mask to save appearances, but he is not really deceived. It is the confirmation of his humour that it stands this final test. His words to Shallow, 'I owe you a thousand pound', humorously contrast the present with the earlier position when Shallow, believing him to be under the King's aegis, readily loaned the money of which every chance of repayment has now vanished.

However sensual and pleasure-loving, he is not degraded to the point of forgetting himself. He limits himself to that blessed state of pleasurable ease which leaves his spirit still free to revel in his own enjoyment and longing to foresee more ahead. To remain capable of pleasure he knows that he must not succumb blindly to low temptations. He resists giving way to any intense feeling that might master him; his humour soars above enjoyment as above all ideal sensations and feelings. He owes his fascination to this unshackled spirit which he preserves throughout by power of humour. It is not irony that would annihilate all existing beings, but humour that leaves mankind to do as it likes, but without acknowledging any binding force in any form of life. That is why he is conciliatory and expiatory, and is delightful when he plays humorously with his conscious self, though sunk in the mire. The knightly order of his time was dressed up in the appearance of ideality; the King's behaviour was solemn, while lacking genuine dignity. There was a lack of moral motives in the conflict of parties; the condition of law and justice was wretched; and self-seeking was universal; of all this the Falstaff scenes are a parody. The State offered the picture of a commonwealth split into factions; therefore Falstaff and his company rose like a state within a state, untroubled about any authority, following their own will and inclination.

Shakespeare, contrasted with Calderon, appears more universal. The principle of honour is rooted in the Spanish national spirit, and the basis of jealousy with Calderon's hero is wounded honour; but with Othello it is wounded love. Othello has loved and trusted Desdemona,

has gained new vigour, and is released from all the cares of his restless life; his stormy African temperament is mellowed to cordial affection. Thus the whole man suffers at the thought of his infidelity; his whole being is torn up by the roots, and all moral order seems to him overthrown. He loses faith in humanity, and his jealousy assumes a demoniacal, mocking character. The original savage forces of his nature burst forth like a mountain torrent, and from the utter annihilation of the whole inner man arises the determination to kill. Not honour, but murdered faith is the absolute cause. His suicide, when he discovers that she is innocent, is not an act of despair, but of atonement. It is a true poetic thought that it does not take place immediately, for then it would have been mere despair. He must live through all the torment of despair and self-devouring rage, and not till that is over does he gain power for his deliberate decision, and his spirit is released. The spirit in its rectitude then rises in judgement against the passion that had overthrown him.

Shakespeare presents Othello as magnanimous and unsuspicious, devoid of hypocrisy, and believing all men to be equally sincere. The cause of his candour and uprightness is his own strength—his manly energy trusts to itself and scorns petty artifice and sordid motive. He looks on man as the creator of his own position in life, he is above all intrigue, dependent on his personality. Without reserve he falls an easy prey to those who spread the net of treachery to enmesh him. As the political background gives dignity to the tragedy, so the heroic character of Othello lends grandeur to his passion. The composure of his confidence makes terribly effective the contrast of his shattering passion. To Desdemona he is sparing of words, and does not show himself swayed by romantic passion, but loves her for her sympathy. After he loses faith in her, mingled with his rage, is still the sign of an eternal sorrow. When he abuses her vilely, regret and longing still sound. His monologue before the actual deed opens with an expression of enormous sorrow, above which dominates the thought of being the executor of justice. Herein lies the terribleness of his frame of mind: in the grip of a measureless passion that renders him incapable of testing evidence, he yet sees himself as the executor of an unavoidable act of justice. The same strength of moral sense which lay at the root of jealousy and murder is the driving cause of suicide. Both show the victory of the moral spirit.

Iago is a villain who, as his evil plans succeed, becomes possessed with a pleasure outreaching his original plan of revenge. His is not the prosaic pleasure of gaining advantage for self by cunning and wickedness, but sheer pleasure in success. He shares with Mephistopheles the pleasure in loosing moral bonds and preparing ruin, but he is so far human that his evil intention springs from justifiable human feeling: he does not, like Mephistopheles, make denial and destruction,



as such, his principle. Mephistopheles is already complete and cannot develop, but Iago develops, helped by circumstances and success of his schemes. Success drives him beyond his original intention, for, unlike Mephistopheles, he has no set plan, but is led by a feeling of revenge towards Othello. He poured poison into Othello's ear and enjoyed his torments without reckoning on the force of passion which was to produce the catastrophe. In short, violence of passion destroys all his well-spun plans and drags him into the abyss just when he believes he has made himself safe.

He has two causes for revenge—one, hurt pride because Othello does not choose him as lieutenant; the other, suspicion concerning his wife. The last is uncertain, but he argues himself into believing the rumour because it vindicates his revenge and makes it retaliation. Shakespeare thus discovers something human in him. He is an adept in handling men, as he understands peculiarities, and can control them accordingly. Richard III has also the art of dissimulation, but of coarser type. Nobody at heart believes in Richard: Anne, of not too firm moral foothold, is carried away by the force of his befooling eloquence—is taken by storm rather than by cunning. Most men see through him and hold him in horror, but he is more masterful and reckless, and cleverer than all the others, and so establishes himself on their ruin, but does not entrap his victim with Iago's accomplished art. Iago is a psychological connoisseur and has qualities which can develop; whereas time presses with Richard, and the great features of the historical picture do not allow of such subtle drawing as those of a tragedy founded on human passion. Richard overpowers with the strength and agility of the tiger, with the sureness and cunning of the snake: his victims become a prey to their merciless enemy before they are aware.

Iago is a necessary contrast to Othello, who cannot conceive such a nature—and only thus is it possible for Iago to stir the hidden depth and excite him to passion. He subtly perceives in marriage itself an element capable of fostering jealousy. The terrible side to the tragedy is the destruction brought on himself by the fire he kindles. The immeasurable force of the passion upset his reckoning: and there is a confounding irony in this, for he dreamed he could guide a passion, and it fell on him and crushed him. In the crisis composure forsakes him; he unmask himself when he kills his wife; he loses his acuteness and power to handle situations. To a certain point in the plot he is master of circumstances, but then they master him, and he is forced to proceed—no longer a free man.

Macbeth and Richard III, at first sight, have much in common. Both wax hideously in crime, and in their overthrow is fulfilled the verdict of the moral spirit. Both expend energy in a series of crimes, both usurp a throne, both suffer self-annihilation. But we interpret

Richard according to his historical background, while, with *Macbeth*, history is not a necessary factor of his growth. Richard is poetic only as the tool of the historic spirit (vengeance); *Macbeth's* fall is that of a highly gifted nature overpowered by demonic agents. Unlike Richard, who interests as a virtuoso of wickedness, *Macbeth* has lively moral feeling. We see a magnanimous nature sink to the lowest depths: the eternal tragedy of will and energy that have once broken through moral resistance and proceed from crime to crime. The legendary character of the history lifts us above reality into the free atmosphere that gives idealistic form to actual events, and what passes before us is only the development of a human and inner tragedy. With this is connected the significance of the Witches, and it is the triumph of Shakespeare's genius that he makes them neither allegorical nor mere visions, but beings like the other characters. They give concrete expression to the legendary character of the whole play.

*Macbeth* first appears as a hero serving the cause of justice, but in this heroic strength lies hidden unbounded longing for greatness and power—a dark spirit of ambition stirred by the Witches' greeting. He has the massive power of men of a legendary age which lends a monstrous supernatural character to his mental struggles. The moral sense which still shows in his first monologue is quenched by the influence of Lady *Macbeth*, and we watch the stages of gradual annihilation of moral restraint. His emotions are violent, and there is a sense of breach in his moral nature. When the crime is discovered he has to act the hypocrite, but the picture of the murder dominates even his fabricated description. The scene with the murderers is the beginning of forcible suppression of any moral reaction. In the scene after he dismisses the murderers there is mingled horror and defiance. The former witnesses to an invincible power to which man unwillingly bends, even after he refuses to acknowledge it; the latter is the negative form taken by the moral sense when horror has become blunted. The end is the inner desolation when even power of defiance fails. Banquo's ghost, seen only by himself, is the vision of what is in his mind. He had just spoken hypocritically of Banquo, and no doubt had a picture of the murdered man in thought. His whole speech to Banquo betrays the working of some power unconsciously to himself; he is beside himself, and succumbs to some moral urge as to a demon within. This horror determines the next stage, and makes him defy every warning and add crime to crime; yet he is disturbed at the vision of the eight kings. The deep underlying meaning of this is that work of evil is useless and only advances the moral order, while destroying itself,<sup>1</sup> and bringing about the reverse of its aim. The attack on *Macduff's* castle is a purposeless act of brutality, and begins the final stage of degeneration. He fears no more apparitions, for the last connexion is broken

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Dowden and Bradley.

with the moral sense that evoked them. His whole being is dulled, and his rage with the messenger marks the failure of his early assurance. The summit is reached when he knows how the oracle has deceived him; mad rage against the whole creation supervenes, and courage is distorted into the frenzied storm of a despairing, hunted man. . . .

Rötscher's criticism has that touch of imagination, the absence of which we have deplored in his countrymen. He has felt the beauty of Shakespeare, and the experience has enabled him to make discoveries in Shakespeare's treatment of moral and political subjects. If a literal touch is preserved, it is one from which we may learn something; it saves him from mounting on wings of fancy to extra-Shakespearian matters, and keeps him within a defined Shakespearian circle. The impression is that he has read and meditated, and then re-read and applied in a definite manner the knowledge which has come to him in his reverie—and there the matter ends. Thus he analyses Coriolanus well, and discovers as the final cause that he offends the human. He makes Richard III almost humanly possible as the product of a time of civil war in which justice and morality are undermined. He summarizes well the reaction of his deformed body in the moral world: why should one who is exiled from Nature obey her laws? By distinguishing between the two phases he brings home that Richard's mind has worked, and he is not a mechanical toy wound up to commit a stated number of crimes. He makes equally effective points with Shylock and Falstaff—as when he says that it does Shylock good to cherish the possibility of the bond, that the wish for revenge arms him against the Mercy speech, and his inner overthrow is too great for words—and of Falstaff that he aims above all at freedom of spirit, which death would destroy. (Instances of excellent natures ruined by ready-made ideas and 'principles' are numerous enough to make one wholeheartedly support this theory.) His interpretation of Falstaff's reminder to Shallow is in a class by itself, the finest fruit of his re-reading with self-enriched mind. Of other pregnant remarks we may mention the comparison of Iago and Mephistopheles, the Witches in *Macbeth*, and the ghost of Banquo. If moral questions are of the first importance to him, he at least recognizes that the moral becomes salient in proportion to the art expended upon it, e.g. the interval between Othello's discovery and suicide—the second phase of Richard III—and the contrast between the wickedness of Richard III and Macbeth.

### III

HANS KOESTER<sup>1</sup> protests against a too ideal conception of the character of Desdemona, which obscures the reacting psychological problems of the play. She is the daughter of an old distinguished Venetian, brought up in the lap of luxury and surrounded with

<sup>1</sup> 'Marginalia zum *Othello* und *Macbeth*' (*Fahrbuch*, vol. i, 1865).

indulgent tenderness. Her mother being dead, her father is doubly devoted to her, and the result of lax bringing-up is selfishness and want of filial gratitude. Shakespeare is a realist in character—as we see from Cordelia's resemblance to her father—and he would not therefore represent one who has been deprived of the necessary influences of family life, entering like an angel into the life of the world. Her father could not dream of any guilt on the part of his idol, and seriously thinks of magic potions. We may be sure that she has ruled supreme over his house from childhood upwards, and the better able to conceal it the worse for her. To seek for power in the guise of humility is the most cunning enemy in a woman's heart. She grows up to be the flower of Venice, wooed by every knightly youth, and her 'supersubtlety' appears in that no one pleases her. It must have troubled her father to find the man to suit her over-satiated palate. She begins to have moods and to grow pale, and Brabantio in anxiety brings Othello into the house, hoping that his stories will disperse her whims.

Othello's colour seems to exclude him as wooer, and he is probably the first man to approach her without self-seeking motive. Both are like two lonely islands in Venice, but it is difficult to give the exact reason for her choice. There was, however, supersubtlety in the decision, and Iago was not wholly wrong. Her speech in the senate is cut and dried as a lawyer's, and it is that of a daughter used to domineer over a weak father. An affectionate daughter would not have replied as she does to the question of remaining with her father. At Cyprus she is scarcely anxious about Othello in the storm, and she responds to Iago's doubtful jokes. She has the pampered, undeveloped nature of one who cannot face real terror, but prefers to distract herself till it is over: unless either Shakespeare is pandering to the taste of his audience, or wishes later to contrast the purified Desdemona in the scene where she asks Emilia, 'Dost thou in conscience think there be women . . . ?'

What we lose in extravagant idealism of Desdemona we gain in the juster understanding of Othello. No hackneyed phrases about Southern passion and unsuspecting simplicity explain his ready fall into Iago's trap. With all his overflowing love there must have been a glimmering sense of Desdemona's unproved behaviour, and Iago's first words might well cause shadows to rise in his soul. Iago then reminds him of her power to blind her father. That she left her old father without a last effort to conciliate is the cause of her later fate, which is the issue of spoiling and egoism. Her irresponsible and incautious behaviour towards Cassio was enough to awaken Othello's jealousy, independent of Iago. Instead of biding her time she pesters Othello, and then complains to Cassio, 'My lord is not my lord . . .'. This was a strange speech to make behind her husband's back to an unmarried man: it implied that she wished him to be her consoler. She never asks herself or Othello the reason of his altered demeanour; she is still her

old father's spoilt child, and with incredible, childish defiance and obstinacy persists in begging, although she sees how it rouses Othello's passion.

And then the all-knower of hearts lets all that is eternally womanly, inoffensive, and sincere, appear under the purgation of Othello's anger, and the dross falls away. Othello and Desdemona have both been disloyal to Brabantio—he as guest, she as daughter. They are not tragically punished through Iago's machinations: according to Shakespeare's penetrating insight, its moral necessity lay within their own souls.

From Lady Macbeth's speech, 'I have given suck . . .', and Macduff's words, 'He has no children . . .', we infer that Lady Macbeth was a widow when she married Macbeth. It throws more light on her character: she had been a cold, evil-natured woman of the highest rank who knew how to entice Macbeth, as yet inexperienced and unspoilt. She is older than he, and urges him towards ambition, holding him subjugated through the weight of her older age. She looks upon him as a product of her own creation, but at last the clouds pile up and make her tremble. The same law that destroys her power works on him till he expends himself in a rage of crime. When he most quails before conscience he has still no word of reproof or complaint against the serpent that drew him from the paradise of peace—but only such hidden hints as '... whom we, to gain our peace . . .', '... malice domestic . . .'. We see no tenderness on his side, and no mutual dependence, but throughout a kind of gnashing subservience to her goading ambition. An occasional 'dearest chuck' does not outweigh the dreadful indifference with which he receives the news of her death. . . .

Here again is the literal, external criticism that treats Shakespeare as though he were a formal philosopher or moral teacher, and reckons without the imaginative meaning added by the beauty of his verse. Such deductions from the facts of the story as that Desdemona ruled her father, that she began to have moods and grow pale, do not concern the true critic. He is intruding his own experience of provincial life into Shakespeare's wonder-world. He is least at fault in insisting that there was 'supersubtlety' in Desdemona's choice, and reminding us that she did reject many suitors of her own race. Otherwise we need only recall such a line as, 'Twas pitiful, 'twas wondrous pitiful', and contrast its impression with that which we receive from the critic—his talk about Cassio as an unmarried man and would-be consoler. The same applies to his estimate of Macbeth, and we suggest to him that if Macbeth appears indifferent at his wife's death it is because, in killing Duncan, he has killed his own soul. We will anticipate Croce's remark that Hamlet cannot love Ophelia, because love means love of life. And that Macbeth can enjoy nothing in the present is further proved by

his 'To-morrow' speech. We may afford a passing wonder that Shakespeare could so impress the reality of his characters on unpoetical minds.

## IV

FRIEDRICH BODENSTEDT<sup>1</sup> contends that Lady Macbeth would be an unpleasing monster, and no first-rate artistic creation, were she without womanly characteristics. There is certainly nothing noble in Macbeth's character: honour more than sense of right makes him shrink from the deed. The murder was not inspired by the Witches or by Lady Macbeth, but arose in his heart. He has no single trait of nobility or moral greatness, and his crime is all the worse that it is deliberate and conscious, and with prophetic foreboding of its disastrous consequences. Only the present and visible world, not the future, concerns Macbeth; he fears neither God nor Devil, but only to lose the golden opinion won by his victory. He is physically brave and a moral coward, and Lady Macbeth only urges him to quick action after he has made up his mind. The one thing to overcome his moral cowardice is his self-seeking. He plots his second crime without her, and here begins the cleavage which reveals their distinct characters. She desires his happiness, and thinks no sacrifice too great to gratify what she knows to be his ambition. She fears the consequences less, as she considers that no one can call a king to account, but although ready to take part she is no cold-blooded murderess. We see the powerful striving of an all-conquering desire, and the struggle to stifle conscience. Hardly has she made clear that by her foresight suspicion will fall on the two grooms than he decides to act—for it is not murder he fears, but the penalty.

Shakespeare knew how to awaken sympathy for Macbeth, despite his cruelties, by making the punishment exceed the crime. Sleep, peace, appetite forsake him; he has no hour of quiet enjoyment; and dearly bought earthly power is nothing in comparison. A contrast to the self-seeking, sanguinary Macbeth is the wife who thinks only of him, lives and sins for him, and disguises her true character out of love. It is not her true character which speaks through her brutal and heartless words; she is not made happy herself, but she suppresses herself as long as she can. Macbeth's moral cowardice specially appears in that he will never bear the consequences of his crimes, but seeks to turn them off on others. He feels himself unhappy and resolves not to see others happy. He is incarnate self-seeking, envy, and malevolence, and dies as he lived—a hardened, callous, unrepentant sinner.

She might have longer withstood the assaults of conscience if she could have made him happy or continued to be some comfort or sup-

<sup>1</sup> 'Mrs. Siddons: Some Remarks on Lady Macbeth and Macbeth' (*Fahrbuch*, vol. i, 1865).

port, or found in his love compensation for her sacrifice; but Banquo's blood had extinguished in him all tender feeling and trust. He felt that she was not the woman to follow him from one crime to another, as he went on his sanguinary way estranged from her. She feels that her power over him is gone, and that he seeks peace through the steeling of his feelings. Thus the whole burden of her overstrained nervous energy, having no further incentive, falls on her alone in merciless reaction. Macbeth feared the deed less than his own imaginings; but she is deeply oppressed by the burden of conscious guilt. She tries to comfort him, but all he desires is to wade further in blood to extinguish conscience. He is heartless towards her terrible suffering, shows no spark of sympathy, and receives the news of her death with indifference. His better feelings become submerged, hers mount, as the tragedy develops, and the only thing he retains is his soldierly courage. His ever-growing self-seeking stubbornness and defiance triumph over warnings of conscience and haunting imaginations of fear and horror.

Not only her own crime but her husband's added cruelties torment her. 'The Thane of Fife had a wife'; in this and similar passages we trace the leading thread through the labyrinth of her character, which shows us more than a spark of womanliness. No female Hun would have spoken about the 'perfumes of Arabia'. Add to these Macbeth's expressions of affection, and the noble deportment that her high standing implies, and, externally at least, we can picture a very prepossessing personality. . . .

When Coleridge wrote that Macbeth mistook the stirrings of conscience for worldly alarms, he confuted once for all writers like Bodendstedt who maintain that prudence, not virtue, made Macbeth hesitate. We need not therefore be detained by Bodendstedt's central argument—and indeed his is another instance of much German criticism—from which Rötcher was a welcome relief—which judges by external events and the prose-meaning of words, and misses the inner poetic meaning. There are, however, degrees in this criticism, and in the most closely barred and shuttered house will be found chinks to admit the Shakespearean daylight. Thus Bodendstedt does well to stress the fact that Lady Macbeth sinned exclusively for her husband's sake—that her heartless words do not express her own character—and, above all, to draw attention to the 'perfume of Arabia' speech.

## V

AUGUST DOERING<sup>1</sup> ascribes Hamlet's liveliness, after the King has left the play, to joy, like that of other pessimists, in seeing his cynical judgement of the world confirmed. It is a perverted idealism, the result of excessive feeling, no well-founded objective pessimism or

<sup>1</sup> Sh.'s 'Hamlet' explained according to its Fundamental Ideas, 1865.

result of general observation, rather a mood induced by a few vivid impressions. Yet it places a barrier between him and his fellow men, and separates him from their interests. He must continue to live in this perverted world, but how mingle with its affairs since all is evil? Why trouble to avenge virtue when there is no such thing as virtue? Why trouble about the moral order when he can see in it no permanence?

When he sees the King at prayer he longs for a devilish and eternal revenge. Considering that the Hereafter has always been conspicuously present in his reflections, it is not unnatural here. That later he should depend upon and find comfort in Providence is a sign of weakness, not of a healthy mind. He believes that a higher power will interpose when action and daring are required. . . .

These remarks about Hamlet's psychology are not without interest, but the best and most characteristic are the reasons which Doering gives to Hamlet for abstaining from revenge. Why trouble to avenge virtue when there is no such thing? Such a statement proves that the critic who begins with externals need not necessarily lose his way in directing his steps towards the centre.

## VI

IT is not easy, according to Edouard Sievers,<sup>1</sup> to penetrate from Shakespeare's works into the actual Shakespeare. His intellect was of boundless compass, embracing all forms of humanity, and his outlook was universal, so that he almost ceases to be an individual, and he hardly anywhere displays one-sidedness or narrowness. This makes his work artistically complete, while its absolute objectivity causes his own personality, like that of Homer, to disappear. But he expresses his ideal through his characters, and in presenting evil stamps upon it his seal of hatred. Goethe's works are completely objective, but it is comparatively easy to fix him with one's eyes. In exceptional cases Shakespeare, like Goethe, gives out of himself in connexion with those struggles of soul arising out of his own life and experience; but, except for the Sonnets, his personal experiences, troubles, struggles of mind and spirit remain almost entirely outside his work. He absorbs himself in the world of actuality apart from his own life, and creates a number of varied and realistic characters, so interwoven with the action that not one has the right to claim to represent Shakespeare himself. They belong to the outer world, and he does not make heroes of poets or artists. He strives to give poetic form to the impression made on himself by life and history. The question whether Shakespeare was directly conscious of his great ideas we answer in the negative, for he was no abstract philosopher, but an inwardly inspired poet. His revelations came to him in a state of divine madness.

<sup>1</sup> *Character of Sh.'s Work*, 1866.



Goethe compared Hamlet to an oak planted in a costly vase. What shattered the vase was his discovery of the falsity of man—the contradiction between the ideal and real.<sup>1</sup> He succumbs and loses his belief in life and in goodness, because he is made suddenly aware of life's dark background. He is thus deterred from action, for a man cannot act for others and for all unless he is essentially sound. Goethe understood this, but recent critics have concentrated entirely on Goethe's idea that Hamlet was unequal to his task. The whole rich, pure human content of the play is lost, and Hamlet becomes a bloodless figure, a 'hero of reflection'.

Hamlet's strivings are connected with this world; it is in life that he seeks his ideal, in the moral relations of men, in the supremacy of the moral spirit, and, above all, in the moral sense of the individual. He demands that the world will show him his ideal actualized—a warrant for his deepest consciousness and faith in man and goodness. There must be harmony between spirit and world, or he could not even enter into the world and life. He represents man's spirit conscious of its divine capacity; and this makes him dare to set himself above the world and measure it by his subjective standard. He is champion of the highest moral demands made on life by man's spirit—and this precludes anything weak, sentimental, or diseased. As the spiritual in him dominates, he is radically energetic; to which opinion Fortinbras subscribes.

When Hamlet first appears he is on the brink of despair, having lost his father. Though his love for Ophelia was subordinate, too little emphasis is laid on its effect on his inner life. However, his struggle is so high that everything personal is relegated to the background of his general moral interests. It is the sign of a deep idealistic nature to aim at the entire surrender of the individual self. That it was natural for him to enter into personal relations we see from his behaviour to his parents, who, for him, possessed all virtues. His love for Ophelia must have shared this essential of his character. The criticism, therefore, is inadequate which confines itself to the idea of a 'great deed' hanging heavy on his soul. It is his mother's remarriage that causes his melancholy and makes him even think of suicide. Not love but base sensual desire led her to it: therefore the world seems to him 'an unweeded garden'. For the first time he looks upon actual life, and knows that he can never regain faith in man's moral nature.

Shakespeare makes of the Ghost too real an appearance, and oversteps the bounds of the purely human. The Ghost's description of his life beyond the grave is the cause of Hamlet's attitude to the praying King. It cannot be denied that a strange magic element, which we no longer acknowledge, co-operates in Hamlet's destruction; but it is only an additional influence, for all else set in motion by Shakespeare

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Doering.

amply suffices to attain his effect. The Ghost is also a symbolic figure, and in so far that his mere appearance shows that here things will be made public which the gods otherwise mercifully conceal, it represents the tearing of the curtain which reveals to Hamlet the true nature of his ideal humanity. It also personifies for him the crime against his father which has made the world evil for him. But all this disturbance has nothing to do with the great deed. What destroys the 'costly vase' is the hideous picture of the world revealed by the Ghost. His life has been built on an illusion: this is the process which Shakespeare reveals with dramatic vividness. Hamlet writes in his tablets that one may smile and yet be a villain, and this is the fundamental truth of his new profession of faith.

In conclusion, it is the only actual classic work that sets forth the Protestant outlook on the world. It represents the torture and powerlessness of a nature that has lost its hold, and fallen out of the world. The great Protestant idea is man's need of faith as the condition of his peace and fulfilment of his mission as a moral being. Hamlet seeks a hold and resting-place in the inner nature of man. Shakespeare lets him go to destruction because he has no support after his idealistic faith in man is shattered. The idea is therefore clear on which Shakespeare bases his representation of humanity, as he unfolds it in the King and Queen. Against Hamlet's idealism and deification of men he sets the sinfulness of human beings. Out of the rude Hamlet of legend he has fashioned Hamlet the incarnation of idealism, in contrast to the King and Queen who personify the essential corruption of human nature. In the foreground remains the internal instability of the soul when not rooted in God, the only certain source of life—and the weakness and torment and destruction of the unity of consciousness which results. In this play Shakespeare has broken through the strict objectivity of his art, which is almost a fixed rule with him, e.g. Hamlet's advice to the players.

*M. Ado* shows that not a human being exists who cannot be thrown off his balance if assailed through his temperament, the Achilles-heel of humanity. Shakespeare never created two fresher creatures, two more loyal and steadfast than Benedict and Beatrice: yet both fall into the trap. Every human being has a vulnerable spot, and if he has a normal temperament and is incorrupt, he is always susceptible to the joy of being loved. On this characteristic Benedict and Beatrice make shipwreck, and are compelled to belie their former selves. We touch on a profound psychological conception, traced in manifold windings throughout the play, and placing it in contrast with *M.N.D.* In the latter Shakespeare influences his characters through the eye, in this through the ear. Don Pedro turns the two adversaries into lovers by obliging them to *overhear*, and artfully robbing them of their peculiar advantage of ready tongues and mental dexterity. They lack their

usual weapons to preserve them from overflow of feeling, and become mute listeners. The moral is that man may boast of freedom and independence, but is helplessly bound to his temperament, which controls his entire being.

The soul of *Othello* is the power of nature over man, and the mind's powerlessness against nature. The external ground of the play is the natural antipathy of race. At first, as Brabantio says, Desdemona 'feared to look on' the Moor. She was roused to admiration by his noble personality, and then overcome with love. She had withstood marriage, but he has conquered both her antipathy to race and prudish womanhood. She tears away every natural bond of home, family, position, and lays a new foundation of life for herself, as if improving on nature. The marriage proves on both sides a victory of spirit; and Othello's actual personality rests purely in the power of spirit. He has not only torn himself away from home, and gone out into the world to form his destiny, but, impressed with the savagery of his race and the glow of the African sun, has moulded a character that seems firm and unshakable. Sure, magnanimous domination over his natural temperament forms the basis of his actual being. He has set before himself a moral aim in life, and subdued to it the human, subjective side of his manhood. If isolation ministered to this power, it also filled him with longing and a sense of homelessness. He was not really happy, but he served his Idea with his whole being and sacrificed personal inclinations, until he won the love of Desdemona. Because he has made himself indispensable even the political system of Venice yields, and he is now at the summit of greatness and happiness—irresistible triumph of the mind.

And yet for Othello the marriage means a decline from himself—he is no longer what he was now that he has given himself to love. He was great because he could stand alone: but now for the first time he has striven for something for himself. His centre of gravity is henceforth outside him; his love is a product of weakness, for it sprang from the hitherto successfully suppressed urge of nature—a reaction of his nature, no overflowing of his spirit which had hitherto withstood marriage. Unconscious of this he still thinks that he will live alone for his office and duties. He only sees in Desdemona's love a shelter of comfort and compensation in the future for the dangers and denials of his calling. But Desdemona's love for him steps in the way; she rather places herself below him, and in this unconditional subjection devotes herself to his personal service, supplanting intellectual interests. Thus neither understands the other; he still lives for his general aim, and she for him. He is accustomed to abandon all personal concern—and she thinks only of personal matters, even to physical comforts. She would sacrifice his greatness to his health: thus she rejoices at his recall from Cyprus, thinking that he will be relieved from cares of State. The

foundation of the tragedy is this contrary striving, together with original racial contrast.

Iago has developed inwardly like Othello, but he has gained mastery by exterminating Nature, not repressing her. He now has no desire which he cannot stifle, and no feeling for others. Only the empty 'I' remains, released from every human feeling, and bond of nature. He has even conquered nature itself, and broken the limits set by nature to humanity; he has made himself a universal being hardly to be called a man. He hates Othello because he cannot despise him; his presence brings home to him his own worthlessness and missed life. Othello's love suggests to him a happiness that he can never find, for he is incapable of love or happiness. The only relief for his state of soul is to bring others to naught; the struggle with Othello therefore becomes an urgent necessity—a struggle for self-preservation. Iago, once incapable of any feeling, falls a prey to hate—proof that in him also nature is reacting against its declaration of annihilation. The motive of the play is the determining power of nature over man.

When Othello, in his famous outcry, bids farewell to the tranquil mind, &c., he is a prey to passion and again becomes the complete Moor. He even falls back into magic beliefs, and rages in almost animal-like savagery. Character has so far gained the upper hand, that he who lived for a general aim is now entirely engrossed in personal revenge. He declares murder to be moral, and becomes Iago's slave. Nature reacting tears from him all that he had gained by suppressing her—all that had become his distinction. . . .

Sievers is inclined to be involved and wordy, yet he is master, not slave, of his theory. He has not wrenched his impressions to suit his theory, but justified them by his theory. The result is that the reader's interest is stimulated in the character-problems discussed, and it may help him, in the study of Shakespeare, to accept even partially a solution, without being committed, as with more tyrannic theories, to wholesale acceptance or rejection. Undoubtedly the critic's best remark is about Benedict and Beatrice; it makes us realize, on the one hand, how Shakespeare's art was the flower of his knowledge of human nature and the drama—and, on the other, it gives to the two an extra human interest that we had not surprised in them before. The comments on Hamlet are sound and point out the way since followed by modern writers: the gist of them being that the disturbing force in Hamlet's mind was his mother's conduct rather than his father's death—and that an unmoral world was hardly worth the avenger's stroke. *Othello*, we think, illustrates the critic's virtues and defects. The theory of Othello himself fails, but the remarks on his actions ring true, even if they do not spring from the alleged motives. Othello in the beginning was no ascetic and self-torturer, but a happy man. His adventurous career allowed him to develop his poetic vein, and success

brought him happiness. Marriage with Desdemona—as Professor Bradley in due time will tell us—was the crown of his romantic life. Yet the chaos in his mind becomes more terrible to us as we read the words of Sievers. There is a touch of universal interest in the criticism of Sievers, because he is able to identify his own soul with the souls of Shakespeare's characters, not only with Hamlet and Othello, but even Iago.

## VII

FLATHE says that Shakespeare believes in free will, and that moral force is always present in the world; that he is no fatalist, but believes in a merciful God who makes earthly sorrow atone for error. Röttscher also speaks of the moral idea in his works, and Sievers of his hatred of evil.

He is, says Röttscher, the supreme artist without bias, inspired by the idea of art, the most original and universal of poets. Sievers also speaks of his all-embracing intellect, his universal outlook, artistic completeness, objectivity, and tendency towards the outer world. The last saying is matched by Flathe's—that he clings to the realities of existence.

Röttscher gives him a mysterious power of character-drawing. Koester calls him the all-knower of hearts, and says that he is rich in treatment of character: as does Sievers, who describes his characters as varied and realistic. . . .

On main points these critics are agreed; they represent the mid-nineteenth century acceptance of all Shakespeare, with a slightly pronounced moral-speculative strain, according to their nation.

## Chapter XIX

### FRANCE 1863-1873

I. TAINÉ. II. HUGO. III. FRANÇOIS HUGO. IV. LAMARTINE.

V. MONTÉGUT. VI. CONCLUSION.

#### I

TAINÉ'S remarks on Shakespeare (1863) in his famous *History of English Literature* now claim our attention. At the outset he proclaims Shakespeare an all-powerful, excessive master of the sublime as well as the base, the most creative mind that ever occupied itself with the details of actual life—a poetical, immoral, inspired nature, extreme in joy and grief, agitated, impetuous, only such as the Elizabethan age could have produced. All came from within, little from circumstances. In *Venus* the fullness of youth inundates even inanimate things. Never has a heart quivered more to the touch of beauty; no painting of Titian's is more brilliantly and deliciously coloured. *Lucrece* is of the opposite kind, but he could embrace the two extremes of things, and so he continued to follow his bent. The 'sweet abandonment of love' was the occupation of one who was tender-hearted and a poet. There is plain-speaking and deep shamelessness of soul in Sonnet 142. Great loves are floods which overwhelm all repugnance and delicacy of soul, all preconceived opinions and principles. Neither glory, nor work, nor invention can satisfy such vehement souls, but only love. It absorbs senses, heart, brain, and all a man's powers, including his imagination.<sup>1</sup>

The first half of his dramas preserve the warm imprint more completely; and the characters of his latest women show how tenderly he loved them to the end. His delicate soul vibrated to the slightest touch; his was a sympathetic genius, a half-feminine abandonment. He could thus forget himself, and become transfused into the objects which he conceived. As an artist he felt intuitively the forces and tendencies which produce the visible external; and his infinitely complex soul became, by its ceaseless metamorphoses, a sort of abstract of the universe. He himself, like Goethe, escaped the perils of an overflowing imagination, and settled down to an orderly life. Perhaps the fire did not break out in his conduct because it found issue in his poetry, and he had passed by sympathy through every kind of human folly and wretchedness. He is profuse with metaphors; every instant abstract ideas are changed into images—like a series of paintings unfolded in his mind. Behind the contracted features of this terrible mask the reader discovers a graceful and inspired smile. Such an imagination must needs be vehement, and every metaphor is a convulsion. No age has ever witnessed so grand a passion, nor has any man so contorted words—as if he shouted every word that he wrote.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Frank Harris.

In *Hamlet* the whirlwind of passion transforms and disfigures all. The contagion of the crime has marred all nature, and the hero sees nothing in the world but corruption and lying. He vilifies Virtue herself, he draws inanimate things into the whirlpool of grief. The red sunset, the pale darkness, are turned to the blush and pallor of shame. All the powers of the mind concentrate upon the present image. His convulsive metaphors might be the work of a fevered hand in a night's delirium. He bounds but cannot run; he is at the two poles in a single instant. He shatters bold ideas by others still bolder, he completes barely indicated ideas by others far removed. The curses of Lear or Margaret would suffice for all the madmen in an asylum, or all the oppressed of the earth. He is the most immoderate of all violators of language, the most marvellous of all creators of souls, furthest removed from logic, most powerful to bring before us a world of forms and living beings. His master faculty is impassioned imagination, freed from restraints of reason and morality. He accepts nature and finds it beautiful as a whole; he shows man at his meals, in bed, at play, drunk, mad, sick. He does not ennoble but copies human life, and seeks only to make his copy more energetic and striking than the original.<sup>1</sup> Hence the want of dignity from absence of self-command. His characters do not select their most noble acts; his kings are men and fathers: Leontes plays with his son and gabbles like a nurse. As in nature, trivial things precede or follow great passions: Hamlet talks of ordinary things before the Ghost appears. Pure nature is violent and passionate, and Shakespeare's characters obey the impulse of the moment—Timon, Posthumus, Cressida, Capulet. Decency is unknown, and indecency is the result of nature and passion. The talk of ladies and gentlemen abounds in coarse allusions. Benedict and Beatrice call each other plainly coward, glutton, idiot, buffoon, rake, brute. Characters go without shame or pity to the limits of passion; they kill, poison, violate, burn—the stage is full of abominations. The actors in the civil wars call for food and drink amid the blood of their victims. Princes are worse than the scum, e.g. Cornwall.

Every phase of a character makes us see, besides the idea which it contains and the prompting emotion, the sum of the qualities and the entire character-mood, physical attitude—everything. The words which strike our ears are not the thousandth part of those we hear within. That every phase exhibits a world of sentiments and forms is due to the fact that the phase springs from a world of emotions and images. All Shakespeare's characters are of the same family, and they have his own spirit. He makes them imaginative, without will and reason, impassioned. The lowest, such as Caliban, have imagination: Ajax and Cloten are more like men, but also creatures of pure mood. Polonius is a great baby—a sort of court speaking-trumpet. Greatest

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Mézières on the real and ideal.

of the babblers is Juliet's nurse, a regular kitchen oracle. The vulgar do not pursue the straight line of reasoning, but let any chance thought divert them. Mechanical imagination produces the fool-characters; a quick, venturesome, dazzling, unquiet imagination, the men of wit. Mercutio, Beatrice, Rosalind, Benedict do not laugh from a sense of the ridiculous, but from the desire to laugh. Compare Mercutio's Queen Mab speech with the dialogue of the French theatre, and you will see the difference between wit which reasons or records a subject for laughter, and the imagination self-amused with its own act. Falstaff has an animal's passions and a witty man's imagination; and no character better exemplifies Shakespeare's fire and immorality. As big a swindler is Panurge,<sup>1</sup> we like him because he has no malice. He exposes his vices so frankly that we forgive them; he is so frankly immoral that he ceases to be so. Conscience ends at a certain point; nature assumes its place, and man rushes on the object of his desire no more conscious than an animal whether he is just or unjust. Falstaff lies more from imagination and nature than interest and necessity. He is one of Shakespeare's favourites because his morals are those of pure nature, and his mind is congenial with Shakespeare's.

Nature is delicate in the delicate body of woman, but as unreasoning and impassioned in Desdemona as in Falstaff. Shakespeare's women are delightful children, who feel in excess, love passionately, and have unrestrained manners. The heroines of the French stage are almost men; but these are women in every sense of the word. Besides being vivacious and petulant, they are modest and timid: the cause of all being extreme sensibility. Desdemona only sees that Cassio is unhappy, and Virgilia dares not think of Coriolanus in danger. They all love without measure, and nearly all at first sight. Desdemona renounces her father, Ophelia goes mad, Juliet kills herself. They are pure not from virtue but from delicacy or love. They recoil from vice as a gross, not an immoral, thing; they do not so much respect the marriage vow as adore their husbands. Imogen faints at the thought that she is no longer loved; Cordelia is ashamed to display her tenderness before the world and exchange it for a dowry. Shakespeare makes Volumnia passionate, whereas Corneille would have made her heroic. It is natural that he should create perfect villains, with unruly passions—and he never lights upon the restraining moral law. Iago is a soldier of fortune, fresh from the horrors of the wars of the sixteenth century, with the maxims of a Turk and the philosophy of a butcher. He estimates Desdemona's love as a mare's, and talks like a stud doctor. He diverts himself by setting passions at issue, and laughs at the result as at a play. His atrocious vengeance is the natural consequence of his character, life, and training.

Shakespeare's genius is still more visible in the great characters.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Charles.



We see the startling imagination, the furious velocity of the manifold and exuberant ideas, passion let loose, rushing upon death and crime, hallucinations, madness, all the ravages of delirium bursting through will and reason. Othello, beset by the graphic picture of physical adultery, cries at every word of Iago's like a man on the rack. Lear is a marvellous creation, the supreme effort of pure imagination, a disease of reason which reason could never have conceived. Plutarch's Coriolanus is a cold and haughty patrician, a general of the army. Shakespeare makes him a coarse soldier, a man of the people in language and manners, an athlete of war, but really a good fellow. He fights like a porter with shouts and insults, and battle is to him a holiday. His life is the history of a mood. The Witches' prophecy becomes a fixed idea with Macbeth, that corrupts the rest and transforms the whole man. The poetry in him shows a generous heart, enslaved to an idea of fate, and capable of remorse. The fatal circlet of gold attracts him like a magic jewel, and he beats down, from a sort of blind instinct, the heads between it and himself. Hamlet is also a story of moral poisoning. He has a delicate soul and impassioned imagination, and so far has only seen the beauty, happiness, and grandeur of nature and humanity. Misfortune suddenly falls on this soul, of the kind to destroy all faith and every motive for action. His first soliloquy shows contortions of thought, beginning of hallucination; and later we see the approach of monomania. He speaks to his friends in the words of a child or idiot, and imitates the cry of the sportsman to the falcon. His madness may be feigned, but his mind, like a door on twisted hinges, swings and bangs with every wind. He finds his strange ideas and exaggerations within him; he does himself no violence, but simply gives himself up to himself. His thought now sullies all that it touches; he rails bitterly to Ophelia against marriage and love; he hardly repents killing Polonius. His thoughts already dwell in a churchyard; and to this hopeless philosophy a genuine man is a corpse. Public functions, honours, passions, pleasures, science—all is but a borrowed mask which death removes, and people may see us as we are—an evil-smelling and grinning skull. This heated imagination explains his conduct also: he does not hesitate to kill the King from our moral scruples. He causes without remorse the deaths of his friends and of Polonius and Ophelia. It is that his imagination prevents him from accomplishing a deliberate act. He can improvise but not plan: his imagination exhausts the will by heaping up images. Shakespeare's psychology was that man is a nervous machine, governed by a mood, disposed to hallucinations, swept away by passions, unreasoning, both poet and animal, with rapture for mind, sensibility for virtue, guided by imagination, and following circumstances at random to sorrow, crime, madness, and death.

In Shakespeare's comedies and half-dramas it is vain to look for a

precise composition, a sole and increasing interest, the skilful management of a well-ordered and congruous plot. He takes tales and novels and cuts them up into scenes; the end matters little so long as he amuses himself by the way.<sup>1</sup> Sixteenth-century playgoers did not require the mighty mechanism of a geometrical plot. They allowed several plots in one, so long as the slightest thread united them. They also allowed the improbability that deprives emotions of their sting—the events that interest or touch us without making us suffer. *A.Y.L.* is a caprice, without events or plots or likelihood, yet it charms. We are borne unwearied on the easy-flowing current of graceful or melancholy emotions. There are antitheses without end, words all a-jumble, quibbles, pretty exaggerations, word racket. The piece becomes a veritable opera, and unlikelihood grows natural. Shakespeare's delicate soul, bruised by the shocks of social life, took refuge in contemplating solitary life. In the peace of the forest we suffer no more, simply remembering that we suffered once. Nothing is sweeter than this mixture of tender compassion, dreamy philosophy, delicate sadness, poetical complaints, and rustic songs. Jaques is one of Shakespeare's best-loved characters—a transparent mask behind which we perceive the poet's face. He is sad because he is tender; he feels the contact of things too keenly, and what leaves others indifferent makes him weep. Impassioned imagination leads quickly to disgust: like opium it excites and shatters. He loves his sadness and would not exchange it for joy; he has the fancies of a nervous woman.

The passion of *M.N.D.* is a dream, yet it moves us. Shakespeare sports with emotions, mingles, confuses, redoubles, interweaves, twines, and untwines these loves like the mazes of a dance. The characters have the abandonment of true love, not the grossness of sensual love. Nothing can be sadder and sweeter than Shakespeare's irony: his raillery against love, and tenderness for love. The sentiment is divine, but its object unworthy; the heart is ravished, but the eyes are blind. Nothing could be more like the poet's mind than the nimble genii who 'compass the globe' in a second. They are all without will and reason, governed by mood, imagination, or passion, lacking the faculties that he lacks, and possessing his vehement sensibility. It is the whole reality of life, unrestrained by decorum, common sense, reason, duty: and we see the poet behind the crowd of his creations.<sup>2</sup> . . .

We feel that if Taine had lived in the age of Voltaire he would have been one of Shakespeare's heaviest detractors. As it is, he revives some of the old charges of the classicists, viz. that characters do not select their noblest acts, e.g. Leontes—and that Hamlet talks of ordinary

<sup>1</sup> Cf. La Place, Chateaubriand, Villemain, Stoll, Schücking.

<sup>2</sup> Taine's remarks on the influence of climate on English literature occur in his introduction and first chapter. Cf. Villemain, Saint-Marc Girardin, Marmontel, Staël.

things before the Ghost appears—that the stage is full of abominations. But the advance of taste and knowledge having made the Voltairean position untenable, the critic must either admire or ignore Shakespeare. Taine was a man of learning, taste, and genius, and yet he praises Shakespeare in rather a forced manner, as if the sympathy between himself and his subject was an imperfect one, but he is urging himself to do his best. The Shakespearian world strikes him as immoral; and here we may compare him to Plato's Hestia left at home to keep house, while other more favoured critics stand upon the outside of heaven and are carried round by the revolution of the spheres to see the things beyond—the colourless, formless, intangible essence, visible only to mind. He sees the beautiful in Shakespeare because it appears on earth, but fails to see that it is one with the good and the true, and therefore is the link between earth and heaven. Had he done so he would not have denied virtue to Shakespeare's women and ascribed all to love or delicacy.<sup>1</sup> He is at his best on the character of Falstaff, or *M.N.D.*, where the moral question does not enter. Of Shakespeare's creative genius he is convinced—as Newman was of God's existence when he looked into his own soul—but in the Shakespearian world he sees only passion raging—as Newman could see no trace of God when he looked out upon the world: and, like Newman, he cannot reconcile the two. In England and Germany the nineteenth century was producing whole-hearted Shakespeare-worshippers; in France there was still occasion for a fault-finder.

## II

VICTOR HUGO<sup>2</sup> announces in prophetic tones that art arises from the absolute, and therefore the end justifies the means. Like the infinite it has a 'Because' above all reasons. As well ask of the ocean the reason for a tempest. At the centre of Hamlet is doubt, at the extremities love; Romeo and Othello are all heart; Lear's grief for ingratitude is worse than for death. Shakespeare extracts from consciousness something unexpected: few poets excel him in psychological subtlety. He reveals clearly the metaphysical fact by means of the drama. The thing that you do not admit to yourself, that you fear at first and then desire: here is the point of union between pure and criminal souls—between Juliet and Macbeth. She fears and desires love as he fears and desires ambition.

Goethe's calm is a mark of inferiority. All souls of the highest order suffer from internal unrest—Job, Aeschylus, Dante. The divine being must become human on earth, must ask himself a riddle and brood over it anxiously. At times you would think Shakespeare afraid of himself, of his own depth—the sign of supreme intellects. The

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Stapfer on *A. and C.* He speaks of Shakespeare's 'serene impartiality like the Creator's'.

<sup>2</sup> *Wm. Sh.*, 1864.

whole human race is contained within his brain. A type fits no one individual, but summarizes in human form a whole family of characters. No single usurer is like Shylock: but from the mass of usurers steps forth one complete, who is Shylock.<sup>1</sup> He is Hebraism and Judaism, great because he represents a race as it has become under oppression. The type contains the mystery of man—therefore it has a strange life—for men would not recognize an abstraction. God makes a traitor: genius makes Iago.

*Prometheus* and *Hamlet* are superhuman works: gigantic impeachments of destiny, society, law, religion. Underlying all is deep wisdom, the tenderness of a giant, a dawn that illumines everything. *Hamlet* deals with the sinister theme of parricide made possible. The thought is cloud, the will vapour, the resolution twilight, at every moment the action is reversed. Hamlet is doubt with a ghost for counsellor. His mind is disposed in layers—suffering, thought, dream. Through the last he feels, understands, learns, eats, drinks, grows excited, mocks, weeps, argues. Between life and himself stands the transparent wall of dream, that cannot be crossed. Yet he represents a permanent human state: the soul ill at ease in life to which she is not suited.

Macbeth represents the hunger of a monster, such as is always possible in man. Do not awake the hunger of those souls that have teeth. Macbeth is that terrifying hungry monster who prowls through history, called brigand in the forest and conqueror on the throne. Othello is night, in love with day. Evil stands beside night, in the form of Iago—evil, the night of the soul. Lear is Cordelia's opportunity: let such a figure be conceived, and the play is created. All this chaos of crime, vice, madness, misery exists to give birth to virtue.

The double plot was a characteristic of Shakespeare's, a sign of the sixteenth century, to be found neither in Aeschylus nor Molière. The Renaissance was a subtle period, and one of reflection: every idea existed in double form. The symbol explains the character by repeating his gesture.

It is not to be regretted that Shakespeare failed to influence nineteenth-century drama. His drama expresses man at a given moment. Man passes, the drama remains, based eternally on life, the heart, the world, and with a sixteenth-century surface. Aeschylus represents concentration, Shakespeare dispersion. In Aeschylus is unity, in Shakespeare ubiquity: and they share God between them. As such minds are complete, we feel in the close drama of Aeschylus the full freedom of passion; and upon the wide drama of Shakespeare all the rays of life converge. Hamlet and Orestes are two sides of the same idea.

Shakespeare is human and general, but also individual and personal. So extended an art means vast equality and profound liberty.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Montégut.

Democracy is in this free poetry: <sup>1</sup> the law of brotherhood derives from the law of work. It is the poet's duty to spread such truths; he must become one of the populace; to bring progress he must recoil before no ugly fact. The distance between real and ideal cannot be measured otherwise. The poet must share the lives of those exiles from joy whom we call the poor. Give up all to the mob, your gold, and your blood which is more than your gold, and your thought which is more than your blood, and your love which is more than your thought: give up all but justice. The use of poets is to irradiate civilization with light. French literature was becoming that of a caste; but the poet has the charge of souls. Teach! Learn! All the revolutions of the future are included in the phrase—*Gratuitous and obligatory instruction*. The poets are the greatest teachers because their works contain beauty. Nothing is too high for the people: it has a great soul, it has God. The beauty of the multitude is that it is profoundly penetrated by the ideal. Ignorance is an appetite; those who are near nature are disposed towards a sacred feeling for truth. Art for art's sake may be fine, but art for the sake of progress is still finer. Genius is made for men, not for another genius: genius on earth is the gift of God. Thence in every country and religion the faith in divine men. To apply the sublime to the human is to produce the unexpected masterpiece. To be useful and beautiful is to be sublime. It does not degrade beauty to make it serve liberty and the betterment of men.

Shakespeare has equals but no superior. He is very English, almost too English. He gives to England the disinterested greatness that she otherwise lacks. He flings the purple over his country's shoulders. Take Shakespeare from England and her glory dims. Neither Sparta nor Carthage could have produced Homer; they lack the tender-sublime that makes a poet spring from the heart of a people. England has this deep-lying tenderness, and the proof is Shakespeare. It needed but a little more to make him European: he is the free poet of a prudish nation. He may be equalled but never surpassed; and whoever would equal him must provide for the needs of his age as Shakespeare did for his own. . . .

There is little definite criticism of Shakespeare in this book of five hundred pages. It is rather the impassioned rhapsody of a man of assured reputation, confident of appreciation, and permitting himself random sayings, knowing that they will be ascribed to prophetic insight. It is the meditation of one who means to be overheard. We move among the greatest; names like Moses, Job, Aeschylus, Michael Angelo constantly sound in our ears; and if our interpreter is not one of these, he conveys to us that to understand is almost to equal. But, needless to say, contact between two such minds is bound to produce some good thing; and the good things are here due to a certain action

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Swinburne.

of Hugo's imagination. He applies to spaces of life or history a kind of encircling movement, and so presses in upon Shakespeare. Thus he tells us that neither Carthage nor Sparta could have produced such a poet. Only he and Swinburne have called Shakespeare democratic; but he does not draw this conclusion from definite scenes or speeches; he explains it from the very stuff of the Shakespearian drama—its expansion, freedom, all-comprehensiveness. His most valuable purely critical remarks are on Shylock. Type and individual have often been touched with the probe of analysis, but never with the fire of imagination.

### III

EVEN criticism is hereditary; and certain remarks by François Victor Hugo<sup>1</sup> on the Sonnets are too good to be omitted. The secret of personality is oftener surprised than revealed, and this critic, by his indirect method of approach, startles us to believe at least for a moment that what we see is Shakespeare's soul.

Vainly, he says, Shakespeare calls upon truth to help him. He says to himself: 'This woman is ugly!' but he finds her charming. He says to himself: 'She is lying!' but he believes her. He says to himself: 'She has a crowd of lovers!' but he finds her chaste. A strange thing how passion contradicts evidence of the senses! How often have we laughed at these madmen who mistake a courtesan for a vestal, who love Marion de Lorme and look upon her as Joan of Arc! And yet these errors are noble; they spring from the insatiable need for an ideal communicated by love to the soul.

### IV

A. DE LAMARTINE<sup>2</sup> says that the truth about Shakespeare, against Voltaire, is that everything in him was immense—bad taste as well as genius. But the bad taste belonged to Shakespeare's audience more than himself: for the audience is absolute ruler over the dramatist. Elizabethan times were not barbarous, but rather affected and corrupt in style. Literature in Italy, France, England began with affectation, not savageness. People in times of birth or rebirth mistake manners for nature. Simplicity in greatness only develops later. Affected language, with sordid expressions and images, is the characteristic of Shakespeare's plays. Shakespeare himself is like Molière, less artist than professional—true offspring of the theatre. Molière was only comic; but pity lies at the source of Shakespeare's genius. He retired early, as one who places domestic happiness above the world's applause. His last years were surrounded by the glory which only brings happiness when transformed to consideration and affection from one's neighbours. To dissect his works would be to dissect the human

<sup>1</sup> *Sh.'s Works translated*, 1865.

<sup>2</sup> *Sh. et son Œuvre*, 1865.

heart, of which he is the greatest painter. Virtue, crime, passion, vice, absurdity, greatness, smallness: he is master of all. His fingers are upon the whole keyboard of human nature.

Italy was the most literate country of the time; it had all the charm and affectation of Southern literature reborn. Spenser owed his sublimity and corruption to Italy; Milton only was saved by the masculine force of his genius; and Shakespeare becomes eloquent and masculine when the force of his theme raises him to the height of his philosophic genius. The British people were more chivalrous then than before or since. Their hearts nursed romantic or historical legends, awaiting the poet who should touch them with solemnity or splendour. Passion is the poet's poet—as Shakespeare knew, and therefore he invented nothing. The clown was a mere concession to the people's laughing mood. Despite the romantic, including Hugo, it is a fact that laughter and tears injure each other: the contrast is too strong for nature. Taste should be as harmonious as men's impressions; and one finds nothing of the kind in ancient plays because the ancients were nearer to nature. Shakespeare makes Romeo previously in love to show his melancholy, passionate nature; and also to express soon after the all-powerful, irresistible, and incalculable force of Juliet's yet unknown beauty. Besides, we see the working of fate in this love at first sight still more because Romeo thought himself steeled by former love against all seduction of eyes and heart. The scandalous comic scene at Juliet's supposed death, between the servant and musicians, interrupts the despairing lament and pious resignation. Its object—in which it fails—is to show the indifference of strangers to the woes of great families. But here all nature grieves at this catastrophe of life, youth, beauty, love. All should grieve—or else there is no tragedy, no more sympathy in human nature. The scene excites horror, and is not in the least comic. It is a fault of taste to be credited not to Shakespeare, but the depraved crowd to which he was obliged to pander. When the lovers dispute about the lark or nightingale, the heart is sounded to its inmost mysteries, and poetry can go no further. The strength of truth and emotion makes Shakespeare's style simple. All about the lovers is innocent and good—except Fate, blind and deaf, which sets a snare and pushes them towards it.

The Ghost in Hamlet is the phantom of the conscience of a people agitated by great remorse. Boldly brought forward in the first scene, it witnesses to Shakespeare's genius. Ophelia's part, apparently useless, is admirably contrived to mingle pity with the horrors of vengeance. The play has three fundamental ideas: the criminal king hiding his guilt, woman's weakness, Hamlet's feigned madness. The Queen does not truly know and does not wish to discover whether her second marriage is innocent or guilty. Such a situation is complex, dramatic, doubly interesting; it keeps the spectator's heart throughout wavering

between horror and pity; it allows no rest in complete hatred or mercy. The grave-digger scene is too startling for the Greek, Latin, Spanish, Italian, or French theatres, but wonderfully fitted for the English, and the thoughtful and philosophic genius of its people. It is like Pascal uttering a last cry over the misery of man—the mockery of death and despair. One can penetrate no further into the void than to wring a philosophy from the cry of nature or the laugh of unconcern: it is the last stroke of genius.

The mysterious word 'verve', which means genius in its freedom, describes Shakespeare's character. He wakes in you more than one impression simultaneously, at the risk of weakening the tragic impression by the contrast of laughter and tears. Independent-minded, he was the one poet fitted to charm an independent race. To appreciate him you must rise above both classical and romantic schools. The dramatist should give us not only perfection but abundance; and Shakespeare's three great qualities are truth, abundance, universality. The spirit which looks on great catastrophes, and finds in them blood and tears, is exactly opposed to the analytic spirit which extracts comic secrets from characters and holds man up to ridicule. Only Shakespeare has observed all and expressed all: the same mind has created Hamlet and Falstaff. The latter alone makes him Molière's equal. He was not indifferent, but passionately interested in all that relates to man—either the sublime or ridiculous sides. After playing upon human nature like an instrument he drew thence a wonderful philosophy that makes him, already Molière's equal, the equal of Pascal.

We feel the basis of Macbeth's character to be good—even Christian. The tragic paganism of modern dramas is not in Shakespeare. Crime may result, but the trend is in accordance with the Gospel. Horror comes from crime that is to be and has been committed. We pity the murderer almost as much as the victim. All the great crimes in Shakespeare are inspired by perverted women: man executes but does not conceive. The mind of woman approaches crime more easily than the hand of man approaches his victim. This power for wickedness is in woman's ardent imagination: Lady Macbeth. The play shows above all God's hidden vengeance for sin. We feel Shakespeare's unconquerable honesty, and that his intellect raises him to God. Dramatically inferior to *Hamlet*, it is the most tragic of tragedies, showing the fatality of crime.

*Othello* is only the best of all melodramas. Its horror is physical; and in this manner butchers would produce the greatest tragedies in the world. The historical plays are far superior to *Othello*. . . .

Lamartine does not put Shakespeare to the test of accepted rules that have served in the past, but treats him as a unique phenomenon. It has been so commonly thought that the French do not appreciate Shakespeare that we are almost surprised to read such a criticism as



this, where no bounds are set to admiration. What most concerns Lamartine is the impression on the reader's mind in the degree to which it is strictly poetical. His needle is deflected by the slightest thing that he thinks external to poetry. Thus he cannot appreciate *Othello*, and he is divided on the subject of tragi-comedy. We value his remark that in nature laughter and tears exclude each other, and that the ancients did not mingle the two because they were nearer nature. He makes us see that, instead of following nature, Shakespeare practised a higher art, in which he sometimes failed: notably in the interrupted lament for Juliet, when indeed all nature should mourn—though we must remember that Juliet was only supposed to be dead. Or in *Henry IV* the Falstaff scenes may succeed the court and battle scenes, like pictures in a long gallery; but in *Hamlet*—e.g. Hamlet's mockery of Polonius—comedy and tragedy are substantially interwoven. On the positive side, among Lamartine's triumphs are the mentality of the Queen in *Hamlet*, and the nature of Macbeth that makes us pity him as much as his victim. He defines emotions so that they expand—much as the modern scientist has enlightened us on the electric constitution of the atom.

## V

WE will now make our way through Émile Montégut's prefaces to his translations of Shakespeare's plays (1868-73). The *Tempest* is Shakespeare's most subjective work, his dramatic testament in the form of an allegory, his poetic synthesis of the world. With admirable simplicity and sobriety he concentrates human nature in Miranda, Caliban, Prospero—highest and lowest, angelic soul and instinctive brute, and the magic power of genius reigning by moral force and sympathy. Such is the *Tempest*, and such is Shakespeare's whole work, the infinite variety of which has been confined to the straitest unity in these few characters. *Verona* has been denied to Shakespeare, but Julia alone would make it his. She foreshadows the loving nature and venturesome tenderness of Viola, Imogen, Rosalind, Celia. The *Errors* has been called inferior to Plautus—but it has fertility of invention, and inexhaustible variety of surprises; and though it may lack philosophy and poetry, it is a masterpiece of gaiety. Also Adriana and Luciana show that Shakespeare has laid aside neither his faculty of reverie nor observation. If *M.N.D.* be judged by the standard of perfect expression, it equals the greatest works. Its gracefulness is as perfect as the energy of *Macbeth*, the passion of *Othello*, or the pathetic force of *Lear* and *Hamlet*. The *Merchant* is one of Shakespeare's masterpieces, and Shylock has become the proverbial creditor—like Don Juan the seducer or Harpagon the miser. The fifth act is unnecessary, but Shakespeare, bountiful like nature, gives to excess. We get the poetry of the emotions of reunion, the intoxication of happy passions, the harmony

of luminous nights—the music of nature and the human heart in concert. Care for fine shades of character distinguishes *M. Ado*, where Shakespeare for the moment lays aside his imagination. There are no strong colours or violent contrasts; the play excels by precision and perfect workmanship. The amusing scenes are his own, and never has the love of sympathy been better painted, the love which springs from the perfect resemblance of characters. The marriage of Benedict and Beatrice is a marriage of souls, for, outwardly opposed, they are inwardly one. The moral proper to the work is perfectly expressed. Life is rain and sun, laughter and tears, light and shade, comedy and tragedy: and the two are admirably intermingled. Small events cause great catastrophes: but such is life. From the poisoned germ of the original story of *M. for M.* Shakespeare has created a beautiful flower, with a rich and healthy perfume which Pharisees should inhale at least once a year. The play unites us to our fellow-creatures by the bonds of common weakness, and teaches us tolerance and fair play. It would need a volume to discuss the question fully: that the law which aims at ideal morality is sterile when it conflicts with nature. Society should have a high moral ideal, but it is intensely immoral to judge men's actions according to this ideal. Claudio is guilty, but which of us would dare to call him a criminal? Nowhere else has Shakespeare collected so many great political and philosophical thoughts. Would we know his opinions on government and social justice they are to be found here.

The *Shrew* seems to be a piece retouched by Shakespeare, with genius, from the work of another, where the characters pleased him. It has not the cordiality, frankness, simplicity, good temper of the Italian version—but it has verve, petulance, movement, imagination. Katharina becomes an excellent woman; but will Bianca make only a passable wife? These are the doubts that rise at the end of the last scene of the fifth act, one of the finest denouements in the records of the theatre, which, for the nature of its impression, may be compared to that of *Hamlet*. At the end of *Hamlet* we see a new play about to begin, new actors who will replace the old. Marriage for Petruchio and Katharina is the end of the adventure—but for Lucentio and Bianca the beginning. Only Shakespeare's profound good sense could associate these two unlike comedies and unite them in so perfect a unity that they are as the face and reverse of a medal. How Shakespeare's genius shines in the drunken Sly! How he discriminates his drunkenness from that of Falstaff and Sir Toby! He is true to the finest shades of the lowest vices, as to those of the most delicate virtues. *L.L.L.* betrays many rehandlings, that have over-developed certain parts; like a building repaired at the cost of symmetry. Shakespeare was as great a painter of nations as individuals, and he is faithful to the minutest details of historic truth and local colour. The detail is as French here as it was Italian in *R. and J.*, the *Merchant*, and *Othello*.

The conversations of the lords and ladies are typically French—even the bad taste of the language sharpened and refined to excess. They are French in that they disguise their serious affections and passions beneath a mask of gaiety. They only admit to themselves that they are in love: for theirs is the French vice—fear of ridicule. The object of the play is to satirize the worst side of the Renaissance. With its scholars and thinkers and poets, the Renaissance also produced a race of pedants. Holophernes is a specimen of the new enemy of light, the new obstacle to moral civilization. Also, like *M. for M.*, but on the laughing side, it shows how vain are laws against nature.

Shakespeare took the whole of *A.Y.L.* from Lodge, yet the two works differ utterly, because he replaced Lodge's fine intelligence with poetry and nature. It is a work that stands alone, and the most original of pastorals. He does not merely contrast town and country life; he transports civilization to nature and shows how citizens of the world can revert insensibly to the Golden Age. Every day Nature gnaws a little at those who live with her, as she gnaws at old neglected buildings. She insinuates her virtues into them, as she winds creepers among ruins and sets moss between stones. Such is the truth at the heart of the ancient metamorphoses. Those who are touched by grief, deceived by ambition, devoured by passion, will find rest in the woods. The Renaissance asked from nature intellectual virtues—those which give simplicity of mind, literary taste, sane methods of scientific research, love of beauty. Shakespeare went further and made man recover nature by his heart and soul, by goodness, love, and pity, by all moral virtues, the absence of which in city life is the cause of the misfortunes of his characters. He returns to the great divinity by means of a kind of Christianity. Among the other great men of the Renaissance, scholars rediscovered nature; with Shakespeare it is the outcasts and pariahs. Jaques has all the ardour of a convert, and to reach such a state of soul he needs must have indulged to excess in worldly pleasures. As contrast to this life with nature we get the feudal life of the first act; and the dark tints of reality make appear more amiable the tender colours of dream and Utopia. Yet the first act gives one of the most faithful existing pictures of the Middle Ages—seen not through pomps, but in the familiarity of daily life.

Shakespeare has transformed Bertram and Helena (*All's Well*), so that they are as truly of our time as the Middle Ages, and we see them in the light of eternal human nature. Had Bertram not been odious we should fail to understand Helena's love; but Shakespeare skilfully makes him seem odious without taking from him the measure of regard and sympathy needed to retain our interest. He is no better or worse than the young gentlemen of all time. There is nothing essential in his faults, nothing to offend the soul; they are accidents due not to nature, but the chance of his condition. He has never thought of

Helena except as his mother's protégée; and, as we see in Florence, he thinks all permissible towards those of inferior rank. His armour of pride makes him invulnerable to truth, and he falls among flatterers. Rarely has a character been more subtly drawn—and the same may be said of Helena. As opposed to Goethe's Marguerite, we see the love of a humbly born woman for a nobleman. Her love is both ambitious and timid; his title frightens but does not dazzle her. In her pursuit she is true to herself; she mingles respect and boldness, discretion and decision. She owes her final triumph to her education; for were her condition really inferior to his she would know less the ways and means of the world. The King is strictly French—in his nobility, good nature, politeness, and authority. This is worth noting, for Shakespeare has drawn many other kings, none of whom resemble the King in *All's Well*. He could not attribute to an English king such absolute authority, as of a father. His English kings speak the language of pride and command—and there they stop, according to their country's civilization. The other characters are equally French, and could be claimed by no other country. Every country has its buffoons and cowards, but Parolles is the typically French buffoon and coward. Lafeu is the honourable old-world Frenchman.

Shakespeare has wonderfully transformed the barbarous original of the *W. Tale*. The miracle of his imagination in creating an enchanted world out of what would seem a desert to other poets is comparable to those countries, such as Holland or Venice, created by human industry against nature. Antigonus, Paulina, Autolycus are not in Greene. They spring from Shakespeare's profound and unique knowledge of human nature and the passions. His faculty of seeing in every subject not only the elements which make it clear, logical, human, fruitful, but those which are potential and hidden, we will call induction. He might read or overhear an anecdote, and at once conclude that such events can only have come about by the agency of certain definite characters. He knew that ordinary jealousy, like that of Pandosto, cannot explain such a story. He therefore made Leontes an entire sensual man, dominated by temperament, and, like all such, unable to reflect, and slaves of imagination. Sensual men can read neither the souls of others nor their own; the violence of their bestiality is such that they think others experience the same emotions as themselves. The love of Leontes for Hermione is gratitude for satisfaction of the senses. And yet Shakespeare saw by the light of genius that such a character is really comic, that he cannot inspire fear, and the reader feels for him what Paulina expresses forcibly. Paulina proves Shakespeare's knowledge of human nature to have been as fine as it was all-embracing. She defies the King because she knows him well, and knows that his violence hides a weak and kindly heart. Hermione is justly restored to life, for it would revolt us were the results of mere stupidity irreparable. In the

loves of Florizel and Perdita we see not one episode, but the whole of rustic life, thanks to Shakespeare's universal genius.

*Twelfth-Night* proves that Shakespeare could both walk on earth and dream, that he is master of real and ideal. If he is less realistic than Bandello it is because he knows that in love poetry is reality—that the more a poet, who wishes to paint love, abandons himself to dream the more real he is. In the comedy of fancy, caprice, adventure Shakespeare is admitted to be without rival, but it has been suggested that he lacks the orthodox comic manner. This is disproved by the episodes of Toby and Malvolio where he equals Molière. The *Wives* is Shakespeare's most realistic comedy, and we think it inferior. Accustomed to his marvels, we stifle in the atmosphere of foolishness, small passions, and restricted life.

The old play of *John* contains repulsive sentiments absolutely distinct from Shakespeare's lofty humanity, impartial justice, and infallible tact which forbade him confusing a monster with a great man. Shakespeare merely reconstructed the old play in better proportions, and yet significantly omitted the scenes of the despoiling of the monasteries. These may be its most original scenes, but are violent, brutal, and blindly anti-Catholic, the work of a Protestant-atheist, like that of Marlowe when he treats of priests, cardinals, or popes, but distinct from Shakespeare who was born in the Catholic tradition and always thought of it tenderly.<sup>1</sup> What the old play did have, in spite of its confusion and ill-drawn characters, was a definite plan, and on this Shakespeare built his drama. He has not disregarded history, but delicately adjusted it to his dramatic purpose. He makes Arthur a child instead of a young man, and Constance a widow instead of the wife of a third husband, but the play thereby becomes more solemn and pathetic. It doubles our dislike for the King, and takes effect by antithesis instead of analysis. The writer who staged the murder of Richard II, the crimes of Richard III, &c., did not fear to represent Magna Carta. He omitted it because it interfered with unity: his object was to display the odious character of the King. From the dramatic standpoint, the murder of an innocent child and grief of a mother had more effect than the greatest political events. And Shakespeare has not omitted the state of opinion that produced Magna Carta. He shows the feelings of the nobility for the King, and the discontent to which the King succumbed. The atmosphere is scrupulously historical, the characters those of the epoch. We are in the first *landed* stage of feudalism, when those who own the land have seized it by trick or force or skill. Falconbridge, rough, brave, loyal, unscrupulous, without inherited rights, but a true lord by his daring, is the living symbol of this troubled time when right is confused with might.

It is impossible that the play which was performed on the occasion

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Looten.

of the revolt of Essex was Shakespeare's *Richard II.* Shakespeare was prudent enough to hide his religious and political opinions so well that critics have not yet discovered them. Besides, had the conspirators chosen this play it would not have fulfilled their purpose. It is absolutely impartial, and yet wholly opposed to revolutionary doctrines. It is full of monarchical sentiments and theories of the inviolable royal power. The deposition is justified as a fact, but wrong according to the law. Richard deserves his fate—but Bolingbroke is a usurper, and the result is a long period of civil war. Richard among his flatterers and parasites has become a solitary, and Shakespeare's dramatic instinct told him that this must be corrected. There must be some one to sympathize with his misfortune or he would become a psychological curiosity. Shakespeare therefore united him to humanity and yet preserved his solitude by representing the Queen who, historically was a child, as a real wife. The groom is also an admirable stroke of genius, and rarely has human nature been more subtly shown than in the character of York. The style of the play may often be in bad taste, yet it makes Richard's character appear far better than a more restrained style. Only an excessive style could paint an excessive soul—an uncertain and vacillating soul, passing in a moment from extremes of confidence to extremes of fear, and arrogance to despair.

Patriotism, comic verve, boisterous good humour, a manly nobleness that does not disdain common humanity and prefers to use popular language—these qualities are found in a high degree in *1 Henry IV.* In the old play, strangely enough, the Prince appears capable of anything, without losing the author's good opinion. Shakespeare, more enlightened, merely insinuates that the Prince did not love his father, and makes us feel it by the contrast of their characters. The frank, open, loyal nature of the one differs utterly from the tortuous, dissimulating, cruel nature of the other. Shakespeare does not take Falstaff from the old play, but straight from nature and from his observation of the world where such characters are to be found more often than one thinks. Or if not from nature, it is just possible that Shakespeare, who read all, was influenced by Rabelais.<sup>1</sup> Falstaff's reflections in Part II on the virtues of sack might be a page directly translated from Rabelais, and retaining the savour of the original. Falstaff and Panurge are alike in qualities and vices—in drollery, type of intellect, humour, lack of moral sense, sensuality, and comic cowardice. Where they differ is that Panurge is young, active, and thin—Falstaff old and fat. Panurge is immoral by deliberate choice—Falstaff is the victim of nature, slave of the flesh. What touches us is his perfect honesty; he obeys the flesh as a child obeys his mother. He is honest even in his effrontery—against all evidence he maintains his innocence. Like all fat men he is without malice and has no will to hurt any man. His

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Chasles.

association with the Prince seems strange, but it contains a lesson. The Spartans exhibited a drunken man to their children; and such a friendship as that of Falstaff to a man in the Prince's position works like vaccine. The pride inseparable from high command can be harmful unless it is purged in the beginning from its coarser elements. Falstaff thus saves the Prince from the future small-pox of pride, so that he may be a worthy king and win the great victory of Agincourt. Most of all Shakespeare's plays this is a living museum of humanity. Shakespeare has been praised for his knowledge of races, but not enough for his fine distinctions between regional and provincial types. Hotspur thinks himself a different kind from those whom he leads to battle. Glendower is a poetic mixture of Breton and Gascon. Douglas is the daring Highlander, true to his word in victory, but losing his courage in defeat. Part II is handicapped by repetition, and yet no unworthy sequel. The heroic part is weaker, but the comic superior. Falstaff is the true hero, and he who has only seen him in the earlier play knows not his full resources. The recruiting scene is a page of history; it exposes the corruption of the lower rank of army chiefs of the old world. Northumberland is a profoundly comic figure—an instance of energy reduced by age. He threatens and then flies to Scotland; though it may be that Shakespeare wishes to show him still secretly fond of the usurper, because a common bad action does unite men. Henry IV's supreme punishment is the bad opinion of his son. Rarely has the inevitable expiation of political crimes been given with greater knowledge of the nature and motives of persons in high places. These two plays, in their form, are the most daring literary works in the world. Never have comic and tragic been more boldly and happily united.

*Henry V*, though despised by many critics, is one of Shakespeare's rarest and finest works. Forget that you are French, and then admit it to be one of the greatest national poems that love of country ever inspired a poet to utter. The victor of Agincourt belongs to the whole of humanity, and claims admiration for all that is noble. The scene where, with an exhausted army of 9,000, he prepares to attack 60,000 is one of the greatest in any poet. He is most unlike a theatrical king; he retains all his old gaiety; and he justifies the Christian maxim that faith saves—for he is all faith. If logic and good sense and calculation of probabilities were always right, his defect would be assured; for he has put his trust in God whose help is uncertain—in his own courage, or, perhaps, rashness—and in his shadow of an army: but his faith is firm, and he triumphs. The play also gives every type of which an army is composed, and every form of military action and camp life—siege, assault, encampment at night, forced march, passage of a river, pitched battle. It is the most vast and complete picture ever made of the world of war.

We think Shakespeare's authorship is improbable for the first part of

*Henry VI*, incontestable for the second, and slightly doubtful for the third. From the time of *Verona* his style was rich in metaphors and images, and though the style of his youth differs greatly from that of his maturity there is no gulf between the two; but *1 Henry VI*, except for a few scenes, has hardly any images or metaphors. It is a kind of versified prose, easy and flowing, going straight to its object, without Shakespeare's atmosphere of meditation. It is rather the style of Greene, rapid, prosaic, with no depth or reverie. The second part has beauties of the highest order, such as the death of Suffolk, and the violent dialogue between the Duke and the Captain of the pirate ship. On one side the violence is that of revolt, on the other of pride. Shakespeare has rarely painted more exactly the radical differences which social conditions impose on the same moral element. York's monologues are terribly true to nature and history: it is human nature in its most general and also individual form. They are the dull rumblings, the restrained storms, of every ambitious soul. They are what every factious man conceals—and they have the pale frenzy of the morose York. Part III is Shakespeare's worst work; it has movement and action, but the movement is sterile and the action without interest. There are too many events and characters, and the imagination has nothing better to do than interest itself in criminals, such as Margaret or Gloucester. And yet, as always in the infinite universe created by Shakespeare, there are beauties of the first order. Among them is the scene of frenzy where Margaret places the paper crown on York. The King's regret that he was not born a shepherd is one of Shakespeare's best monologues. The episode of the father who kills his son brings home all the horror of civil war.

*Richard III* has incredible psychological depth, and the grandeur of certain scenes has never been equalled by Shakespeare or others. The events follow logically, yet Shakespeare, like the chroniclers, seems more anxious about their succession than generation. The style also is dry, like that of *Henry VI*, and the play is not one of Shakespeare's masterpieces. It owes its success as much to the interest of the subject as the poet's genius, and to the perverse taste in human nature for the monstrous and criminal. But to equal the scenes of Margaret's curses and the lamentations of the three queens we must return to the Greek theatre. To ancient grandeur Shakespeare adds the modern soul's innumerable complexities in good and evil. Never has the fascination of political power been better expressed—from which the soul that greatness has most injured cannot be disillusioned. Both Anne and Elizabeth yield when they see a new perspective of greatness. The character of Richard himself is taken from popular tradition; for had Shakespeare followed another method he would have sinned against the laws of his art by depriving Richard of the unity which makes him the finished type of political scoundrel. Shakespeare knew, what historians



do not, that certain characters like Richard have uncanny power, and create an atmosphere of terror. They can assassinate without steel or poison or word or gesture, but simply because they exist. All who surround Richard are ill at ease, and it is one of the miracles of Shakespeare's genius that the play is electric with nervous anxiety. Richard's object was revenge on nature that had made him a cripple—and we therefore ask if all cripples are the enemies of society. The answer is that a cripple fortified by Christianity can become a model of virtue and nobility whom the favourites of nature and fortune will envy. But if he is no Christian? This is Shakespeare's terrible question to which we will attempt no answer.

Shakespeare has made real the eccentric and inconsistent figure of Timon which he received from tradition. His indignation is that of the good man who for the first time sees the ugliness of human nature which the rich rarely see. He is as reckless in hatred as he was in friendship, and shows as little knowledge of the world. Reflection would have taught him that men are more cowardly than wicked: but his poetry consists in his violence. Alcibiades is the foil to Timon; and Shakespeare, impartial as ever, makes the contrast of two different natures in the same situation and leaves us to draw the moral. *T. and C.* has the stamp of parody: and here lies the interest. We have before us the opposite poles of literature—Homer and Shakespeare. We see the classic muse gently bantered by the romantic—the moral civilization of Christian Europe judging the ancient heroic pagan standard in its purest form and finding it narrow, simple, and naïve. Perhaps Shakespeare was too penetrated by the spirit of the Middle Ages, by Christianity and chivalry, to appreciate Homer. He implies that we have experienced finer passions, our memories are longer than Nestor's, our adventurers have surpassed Ulysses, and our knights Achilles. We are also grateful to him for expressing the feeling latent in us all, that Achilles is a cowardly murderer, and Hector the true hero of the *Iliad*.

Shakespeare has impartially depicted in *Coriolanus* one of the greatest types of human nature, the aristocrat with his lights and shades, qualities and defects. Perhaps he is an English gentleman as much as a Roman patrician: but human nature is the same in all countries when conditions are the same. Pride does not always spring from preoccupation with self, but from the sad experience of the worth of human nature, which the great have most opportunity to acquire, because they have often seen what threat or bribery can extract from the baseness of men. The cause of aristocratic insolence is contempt for the cowardly acts to which the weak and wretched succumb. Note that they *succumb*, that they do not commit them willingly: and in these words men like Coriolanus are condemned. It does not strike him that the cowardice of his soldiers is the condition of his greatness, that if all alike were brave he would be less distinguished. And yet he is pro-

foundly interesting and sympathetic, because his pride is not founded on self-love, but on love of the virtues which ennoble him. The play is not as Roman as *J.C.*—and, indeed, what often passes for local colour is the accuracy with which Shakespeare paints universal human nature. The greatest thing in *Coriolanus* is the contrast between aristocracy and democracy, and the laws that regulate them. As yet there is no science of politics—and only Machiavelli and Montesquieu have hinted at it. When it is established, this play of Shakespeare's will be one of the most authentic and historic documents bequeathed to us from the past. *Coriolanus* is an English gentleman, Menenius Agrippa one of merry England's humorous old noblemen, the election scenes above all are more English than Roman. Perhaps the conversation of the ladies strikes a more historic note: mother and wife are types of the Golden Age of the Republic. But more important than any local colour is antique character: predominance of the heroic. Where the heroic predominates, there, more than in any local colour, will be the spirit of antiquity. Ancient drama has nothing more solemn, grand, or noble than the interview between *Coriolanus* and his mother in the last act, and the scene where he introduces himself to Aufidius in the fourth.

A rhetorical strain through *J.C.* distinguishes it from Shakespeare's other plays. It is addressed neither to the imagination nor the feelings, nor to passion, but to the reflective, philosophical, and political faculties. We see great souls oppressed by political causes. No vast imaginative perspectives are opened, as was Shakespeare's wont, but Rome is the definite frame. It is the most Roman of the three plays, it marks all the shades of high Roman society at the end of the Republic. All the characters are Romans, but each is an individual. Brutus's error is the eternal one of the intellectual who does not relate conviction to experience. Cassius only sees the interests of his class and the security of his personal liberty. He looks on all natural superiority as a threat to his privileges, and he considers treachery and murder a natural right. Casca is the traditional old Roman, brutal, superstitious, made for force alone. Antony represents the younger generation, and will take any side for the sake of power. But it is in presenting Caesar's soul that Shakespeare has displayed the whole of his genius. We see Caesar in his last hour, raised above earth by his great soul and the joy of triumph. Struggles are over, obstacles surmounted, he is no longer a hero but a god, and he talks like one whose apotheosis has begun. Shakespeare here follows Suetonius and is true to history—and it also explains the revolt of Brutus and Cassius and their fall. It is a double proof of genius thus to show Caesar as the offspring of destiny. Dante condemned Brutus and Cassius equally with Judas Iscariot, because all three outraged the moral order. Christ and Caesar are the two poles on which the world has turned for 1,800 years. Shakespeare agrees that

Brutus and Cassius sinned against the gods, no matter what their motive. The tragedy is not the death of Caesar, but the error and punishment of the noble Brutus—the Platonist who failed to see that a great harmony was demanding to be born—that the rule of the city was over and that of the universe about to begin.

For the first time (in *A. and C.*) we reproach Shakespeare with lack of unity—for it is moral unity. In his other plays he never fails to preserve it, though it is never the same unity, but varies with each one, so that he has as many unities as plays. Here the action is too fragmentary, the scene too vast, the passions too complicated with undramatic elements. Instead of concentrating on Antony and Cleopatra he has painted a vast picture of the Roman world. The episodes are slightly related to the principal subject or not related at all, e.g. Sextus Pompeius, Ventidius. We would pass over the vastness of the scene if the different parts of the action were strongly localized: if, while at Rome, we felt ourselves at Rome, &c. But the interest is never concentrated entirely on the place where the action is happening: the reader's eye is fixed simultaneously on Alexandria, Rome, Athens. And the people likewise are thinking of each other as if from enormous distances. Finally, art deals with simple passions, but the love of Antony and Cleopatra is mixed with political and moral interests, which change its character, dissipate the reader's attention, and exclude sympathy. And yet Cleopatra is Shakespeare's most ingenious, penetrating, and audacious portrait—irresistible because she is composed only of feminine elements. She is a perfect epitome of feminine defects, of the kind that inspire passion, because they arise from weakness and are shrouded in gracefulness. Here lies woman's power, because the same vices, open and brutal in man, inspire hatred, while with women they are associated with weakness, and inspire love. Cleopatra is coquettish, nervous, rapacious, cruel, cowardly, uncontrolled, haughty. She is all these without contradiction: they all belong to one nature.

*Lear* is Shakespeare's most heart-rending work, because it most shows the weakness of human nature. The mistake of a moment will destroy the happiest conditions. Our instincts are less sure than those of animals; our hearts and souls are too blind to recognize the true sentiments which support or threaten them. *Lear* curses the daughter who loves him, and trusts those who from indifference pass to hatred. Gloucester, without a moment's doubt, listens to Edmund. We neither know nor have means to know each other, so isolated are our souls in their dungeon of flesh with its opaque walls. We are all like Cordelia, who cannot speak what she feels, who is dumb from excess of tenderness, and is thought not to love because she loves too much. The denouement is cruel to the point of immorality, surpassing Shakespeare's other plays. Never was Shakespeare's moral philosophy more

bitterly expressed. Nature and fortune mock at good and evil, innocent and guilty: if evil does not rule the world neither does good. Cordelia succumbs to filial love as Edmund the parricide is caught in the snare of his crimes. Lear is a complete and penetrating study of madness. He was already mad before his outbreak; it was madness to disinherit Cordelia; it showed a perverse state of soul. To yield his possessions and place himself in the power of his children was a sin against prudence. We have many madmen among us who are unknown because they have not been tragically proved.

*Macbeth* shows us how Shakespeare's dramatic system differs from the French. Our tragedians seek the universal man in the individual, while Shakespeare expresses universal man by means of the individual.<sup>1</sup> Macbeth is a general type of victorious ambition, but also a feudal chief, head of a Highland clan. Shakespeare was as great a historian as poet, and no modern researches have revealed more of the Scandinavian, Scottish, and Italian characters than *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, and *R. and J.* Each character has the stamp of its moral physiognomy, and also that of its time, country, race, even its province and tribe. Glendower (*Henry IV*) is a Celt, like Macbeth, but of how different a nature! Glendower has something of the Gascon; he is the Gaulish Celt, poetically superstitious, loquacious, and melancholy, but truly brave. Macbeth is the gloomy and odious kind of Celt—the Scot as yet savage as the fogs of his rugged home—undisciplined, both rebel and oppressor, making a law of his personal desires, unjust even in a good cause by the abuse of force. All is in keeping with this sinister character. Nature, usually kindly in Shakespeare, appears in storm and darkness. Next to the Scot comes the feudal chief. We see how heavily remorse weighed on the soul in the Middle Ages; we divine the corroding strength of the secrets of feudal houses handed down from father to son like an evil heritage, to sap and finally destroy the family. The remorse of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth is not only horror at their crime, but the result of isolation from inequality of conditions. Feelings gathered terrible force with human beings living the isolated feudal life. Their equals are far away, solitary like themselves—their relations with persons near them are those of command. If a violent act is done fear keeps it secret. Fear mounts again from servant to master and doubles his anguish. He sees that he inspires fear and comes to fear himself. His lips are closed, but conscience wakes, and the storm rages within. Hence the sighs and groans overheard from the tyrant in the watches of the night. Shakespeare transmutes into living poetry these feudal terrors. A vaguer, more general Macbeth, neither head of a clan nor a barbarian, would make impossible many fine expressions of remorse. Now we will consider the moral man: the incredible mixture of ferocity and cowardice, baseness and grandeur. He is not without

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Hugo.

human feelings, but he is without civilized moral feelings. Life flows or ebbs with passion: physical courage and cowardice are mingled. His wild beast's courage and joy in battle destine him for crime; yet he needs Lady Macbeth to make his ferocity firm. She is the soul of the crime, and her character is simple, created by a single impulse of genius. She equals the greatest ancient dramatic characters, embodying, like Clytemnestra or Medea, humanity's black thoughts. Fierce, cold, ambitious, she is a feudal wolf who retains in crime the virtues of a Northern woman. A faithful wife, she loves her husband with the loyalty of a savage heart. She never hesitates, for Shakespeare knows that a woman's conscience is in her heart, that her justice and sensibility, pity and morality, are one.<sup>1</sup> When the crime is done, Macbeth belongs no longer to himself, but to his fears and visions.

The pivot of *R. and J.* is Mercutio, for to remove him would be to make the duel between Romeo and Tybalt less comprehensible. Only the loss of Mercutio, his most cherished friend, could make Romeo forget Juliet and attack Tybalt. The play is typically Italian, for elsewhere Shakespeare's characters reveal themselves gradually; their passions are inward and hidden, till at last their violence overcomes the will. Here they are external and make no attempt to hide themselves: two simpler characters than Romeo and Juliet could not exist. They belong to a country where all is light and sharply defined, where life has no more secrets than nature, where night itself has no shadow, and darkness belongs only to death. From the outset Romeo and Juliet have no mystery or intimate life hidden away in their souls; they think and speak aloud without restraint or shame. They are like children, and this circumstance, which makes their characters simple, transfers to their passion the whole interest of the play, and increases its intensity. They have no past to interfere with them, no memories to harass them, no regrets or remorse. How could Hamlet love Ophelia amid his preoccupations? Othello regrets not only his love but his glory. Through Romeo and Juliet Shakespeare expresses love itself, all that it means and can extract from human nature. He has separated it from every kind of extraneous passion by making it arise spontaneously in the children of rival houses who have more reason to hate each other. He has chosen the age when pleasure seems a natural right. He has removed all constraints that timidity of character, educational misunderstandings, unequal conditions oppose to its development by choosing two young and vehement Southerners, of equal age and condition. He has not distinguished between physical and moral love: the love of Romeo and Juliet absorbs the whole being, body and soul. It may be rare for all the elements of a passion to unite, but not impossible. If not ideal it is absolute. The love of Romeo and Juliet is better than ideal: it is love.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Guizot and Stopford Brooke.

The earliest *Hamlet* dates before 1603, and probably belongs to Shakespeare's youth. It may have been his favourite play that occupied all his life. Certainly it has not spontaneity, and seems to have been built up by an indefinite series of meditations. It is his most personal work, for in his other works he develops and orders material supplied by others—but here he invents incidents and characters, and even the main motive—the intervention of the Ghost. It is his most philosophical work; the manifold incidents are unified, and every scene is a step towards destiny. It is the image of life itself; the persons advance without knowing their objective. The inaction of the first part of the play is its action; but when it transpires that Hamlet cannot execute the Ghost's command, destiny takes up the work, and then the action accelerates. The characters accomplish each other's tasks: Laertes is revenged on Hamlet by means of Hamlet, and Hamlet on the King by means of the King. Never have the two conditions which govern our life on earth been better shown: on one side man's slowness and powerlessness in face of obstacles; on the other the cruel impatience of the eternal laws which seem to resent our delays and hasten to remove and replace the generations. This may sound abstract, but it is made brilliantly concrete. All is steeped in the North—the serious, virile superstitions—the strong, inward passions, unlike the exuberant Southern passions which tend outwards (*Othello*, *R. and J.*). The first scene makes us shudder with the cold wind of the North. The vegetation, the pool where Ophelia is drowned, the mournful cemetery—all are typical of the North. The characters are themselves alone and will never be seen again. Let those who believe in aesthetic rules avoid this play. That such persons should exist, there have been unexpected meetings and unique collisions of moral atoms. Shakespeare's marvellous creative genius resembles nature's. His persons have not one but a hundred characteristic peculiarities. They are strongly marked individuals, and they remain in our memory like people we have known, not types. What is Polonius except Polonius? There has never been another Polonius in the world. Made up of good sense and foolishness, he is experienced and childish, subtle yet tactless. He gives the best advice in the world, but he does not answer your question. Ophelia's character consists in having no character. Hamlet is thought to be the type of a dreamer, but he is a distinct individual. His weakness is to love excessive talking, and his habit of analysis paralyzes his will. Continuous meditation disturbs his balance and develops scepticism which unfits him for ordinary action. He does not lack energy, but is masculine, energetic, brave, loyal. So far from being sentimental, he can be hard and even brutal. Indeed, this man, whom we consider modern, is feudal and comes from the Middle Ages. He represents the hour when true noblemen, roused by the Reformation and Renaissance, rub their eyes, astonished to see old symbols vanish, and feel a new

spirit in themselves. This union of two contrary spirits is apparent in Shakespeare's play. There were many Hamlets in those days—surrounded by the dying forms of the Middle Ages. The spirit was converted, but the flesh clung to old customs.<sup>1</sup> A scruple restrains the arm from striking: like Macbeth, who has the milk of human kindness. Essex,<sup>2</sup> Leicester, Raleigh, Sidney have common traits with Hamlet, and may have given Shakespeare hints. They divide among them his attitude of soul—secret anxiety and grave sadness, subtle but fanciful philosophy, elevation of thought mixed with superstition, proud address, intervals of hardness and roughness, irresolution. These are single traits, but the essential one is the *historic* trait. Hamlet instances the position of the heirs in the Middle Ages when the sixteenth century struck; he unites two natures; he is the last feudal man, the first modern man. But if he owes his individuality to a historic cause, he owes his beauty and grandeur to a loftier cause. He loves truth, he hates superficial men, he cannot lie or be insincere, or understand even the lies of the heart, e.g. that his mother should forget his father. In all this he is profoundly modern; and the feudal shadows disappear before this thirst for knowledge and love of truth for truth's sake. These feelings produce a distinct manner of living for the elect only among human beings; but they affect the temperament and make the nervous predominate over the sanguine and bilious. Certain souls have thus a moral life which used not to exist, and is due to special love of truth; and three typically modern heroes are Hamlet, Alceste, and Werther.<sup>3</sup> Three poets traced their ideal man and gave him the heroism of frankness as the supreme type of elevation. . . . Lastly, the play has none of the usual dramatic motives—jealousy, love, ambition. It is founded on a complex mood of the soul, made up of two questions: Hamlet's—how he shall revenge?—and the spectators—will he succeed? In this suspension and long uncertainty lies the immense dramatic interest—only rivalled by *Oedipus the King*.

From the story of Cinthio, the elements of which are those of melodrama, Shakespeare composed *Othello*, which his art raised to tragedy—an original kind of tragedy uniting simplicity and elevation. The chief characters may be highly placed, but we are in the world of ordinary bourgeois life, e.g. Brabantio's home, the private life of Othello and Desdemona, the lost handkerchief, the frivolity of a serving-maid. *Othello* proves that tragedy can deal with private life; and yet it is a unique exception in the kingdom of art. When Shakespeare introduces realism it is usually for the sake of contrast, but here it informs the whole. Unlike *Hamlet* the characters and passions are simple, and intelligible at first reading. We have called Shakespeare's characters individuals, but they are also types, constructed on no French system, but on the national, inductive system of Bacon. Shake-

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Kreyssig.    <sup>2</sup> Cf. Mathew, Winstanley.    <sup>3</sup> Cf. Mézières and Stapfer.

speare assembles and examines all the separate facts that concern one passion; he does for the human soul what Bacon does for nature. As Romeo expressed all love, so here Shakespeare has searched out and united all the circumstances that intensify jealousy, e.g. the age when man is saddened by autumnal damps and knows this love is his last. The men who are easiest struck by jealousy are soldiers, to whom honour is all, whose social and private life is simultaneously shattered. And the races most ready to yield to the passion are the African—men of the infinite freedom of the tent and desert, whose happiness and security are ruined by deception. Othello loves Desdemona for his own sake rather than hers, less from gratitude than the happiness with which she intoxicates him. He unites all the conditions, but he becomes a type because he is an individual. Iago is the typical mediocre man—the kind who are harmless because they are powerless. Give them power and the result will astonish you. He is not capable of meditating a great crime, but merely wishes to pain the Moor. He begins with malicious falsehoods, and then perceives his safety depends on confirming them. When lying no longer avails, he steals, and from stealing proceeds to murder; but his fears increase at every stage. Desdemona is Shakespeare's most touching and interesting heroine, but not the most pure and chaste. In her marriage she less obeyed nature than the noble feelings instilled by education. Othello's virtue, bravery, and long sufferings blinded her to the gulf between them; and she gave herself to the old soldier as an expiatory victim for his hard life. May we say there is a touch of perversity? But if so it is the kind of which an angel might be guilty: it is excess of seraphic zeal.

In *Cymbeline* we see opposed two races—Italian and English, Northern and Southern. We can only object that Shakespeare revealed only half their characters—the noble half for the Northerners, the bad half for the Southerners. Italian politics may be tortuous, but Italy had the capacity for greatness; while against England's morality we must offset her brutality. *Cymbeline* is a veritable anti-Italian pamphlet; but to the sixteenth-century Englishman, Italy was an object of astonishment and horror, of love and hatred. Many as are the plays about Italy by Shakespeare's contemporaries, not one shows her people except in the blackest colours. . . . We note in Shakespeare's later work, as in the autumnal periods of other great geniuses, a tendency to paint the real world in the colours of his dreams. He penetrated still further into man's heart to discover its secretest motives, and trace to their very sources its passions. Thence the curious combinations of real and ideal, fancy and logic. The three last plays give us the finest but also the most precarious balance that poet ever attained in combining nature and dream. . . .

These studies are in the best spirit of French criticism, and would have been approved by Matthew Arnold. The French Academy,



according to Arnold, made a writer feel that he was speaking before competent judges and appealing to cultivated opinion, and he must therefore refrain from violence or extravagance. Montégut writes at the climax of the ages of faith; he is among Shakespeare's most whole-hearted admirers; no Englishman or German could surpass him in enthusiasm: and yet the prevailing note is moderation, even when he deals with the most disputed subjects. That he is one of the major prophets in a ripe period of the ages of faith we see from his praise of *Henry V*, and still more by his habit of finding virtue in everything that Shakespeare touches. Thus he tells us that only an excessive style could paint the excessive soul of Richard II—and Falstaff worked like moral vaccine on the Prince. He considers the denouement of the *Shrew* one of the finest, and equal to *Hamlet*. His faith in Shakespeare is so firm that he considers it a critic's duty to find good in everything; and it is but natural that his discoveries should vary in happiness. He defines well the characters of Benedict and Beatrice, of Leontes, and to a certain extent of Bertram; but in attempting to glorify Caesar he fails as many before him have done. He differs from critics like Mézières in that he contributes to the interpretation of Shakespeare a larger measure of his own experience of life. He by no means thrusts it upon the reader; it is not extraneous information, but rather the knowledge that comes from living, reading and observing, well meditated. The simplest instance is *R. and J.*, where, he says, love if not ideal is absolute—it is better than ideal: it is love. That a Frenchman should discover a peculiarly French quality in *L.L.L.* and *All's Well* is naturally of great interest; and, because of it, we almost accept the likeness of Coriolanus to an English gentleman. But the feudal explanations of *Macbeth* and *Hamlet* overshadow in interest; and the latter is the more satisfactory. There is something about Macbeth's soul that rejects the bounds of time and space; whereas it does not diminish Hamlet to think of him as the victim of the confluence of two epochs: and we know that as the Middle Ages waned there were terrible signs and portents both in the external world and the human soul. The 'nature-worship' of *A.Y.L.* has been described before, but he adds to it another shade of meaning. We may say the same about Richard III, who creates an atmosphere of terror and assassinates without steel: though the praise of certain scenes, unequalled except by the Greeks, is out of proportion. His explanation of Northumberland (*Henry IV*), we think, is characteristic of those loyal followers who raise to a higher power what modern critics would condemn as a fault. He contributes little to *Othello*; and his remark, suggested by Cordelia, that our souls are isolated, is one of those critical afterthoughts with the melancholy interest that wisdom after the event has in life. About *A. and C.* he says that even while at Rome we do not feel ourselves there; and people think of each other as if from enormous distances.

We may call this a critical hybrid; it may be either praise or blame; and while we balance the suggestions the glory of the play returns upon us. But the last word about Montégut is that the reading of Shakespeare has expanded his nature to the full, so that all his knowledge, both intuitive and acquired, has been pressed into the service of interpretation, at the price of occasional over-statement.

## VI

WE cannot do better than start with Taine's saying that Shakespeare had the most creative mind in the world, with impassioned imagination for its master faculty—though he considers that he works like nature without morality. Victor Hugo gives him universality and also unequalled psychological subtlety. François Hugo admits the mysterious life of his characters, and somewhat approximates to Taine by insisting that he was in need of an ideal. Lamartine says that he is immense in all, both genius and bad taste—though the latter is due to his age. He is the greatest painter of the human heart; he has the keyboard of human nature beneath his fingers; he is a philosophic genius with truth, abundance, universality, and unconquerable honesty—with an intellect that raises him to God. In contradiction to Taine and François Hugo, Montégut says that he had a delicate moral sense and beautiful soul. He had profound good sense; and his unique knowledge of human nature and the passions was of the inductive kind that sees hidden and potential elements. He was a universal genius, master of real and ideal, with lofty humanity and impartial justice. His characters bear not only a moral stamp, and that of time, country, and race, but even of province and tribe; and he knew more about human nature than all the historians in the world. His creative genius was like nature's.

About his characters, Victor Hugo says that the individual steps out of the type; Montégut, that he expresses universal man by means of individual man: his characters are strongly marked individuals—like persons known, not types—but they are also types constructed on the inductive system of Bacon.

Montégut considers him as great a historian as poet—a poetic microcosm of the Middle Ages. On religion he says that he hid his own opinions, as he did on politics; but he is a living summary of Christianity and chivalry. . . .

It is apparent that praise can go no further than with some of these critics, but, as always in France, there were not wanting antidotes to the highest enthusiasm. However, the illusion is now fully dispelled that Shakespeare has lacked French appreciators.

## Chapter XX

### ENGLAND 1870-1878

I. MILES. II. HENRY BROWN. III. HALL. IV. PATER. V. DOWDEN.  
VI. A. W. WARD. VII. JACOX. VIII. FLEAY. IX. FURNIVAL. X. SNIDER.  
XI. CONCLUSION.

#### I

THE work of George H. Miles<sup>1</sup> on *Hamlet* is worth including, because it throws off some general criticism of Shakespeare. He derives the play's uncertain and unfathomable interest to the influence of faith and resulting confusion of purpose. When death is the door to vaster spheres, deeper faith should find its echo in deeper art. The immortal weal or woe of a human soul is at stake. *Hamlet's* main sorrow is his father's eternal doom—as revealed by the Ghost—rather than his sudden death. He will therefore not kill the King at prayer, but give eternal doom for eternal doom. Depths of faith reveal darker possibilities of revenge. The mood does not last, yet it possesses him when he meets his mother. It is the only play where interest in the central figure extends beyond the grave. The question of eternal loss or gain is constantly suggested. This final appeal from time to eternity gives the drama such universal, indestructible interest. Strike out any other single play, and though the loss would be irreparable, the main characteristics of the entire fabric would remain the same. Strike out *Hamlet*, and the whole structure is altered. . . .

We rather approve the critic's general theory than its applied instances. It certainly does not solve the old problem of *Hamlet* sparing the King at prayer, or account for his interview with his mother. Also the critic in his zeal forgets that purgatory, not hell, was the Ghost's dwelling-place. What he says of the place of *Hamlet* in the entire Shakespearian edifice is no doubt true.

#### II

SOME ideas in Henry Brown's<sup>2</sup> book on the Sonnets are worth considering, though their appeal is indirect. They belong to the class of criticism which deepens our sense of the greatness of Shakespeare's mind by revealing the innumerable echoes which the Shakespearian chord awakens in other minds. The Sonnets, he says, are of the nature of parodies, and Sonnet 20 is the key to the whole series. Shakespeare did for the sonnet what Cervantes did for the romance, but he had also the high purpose to teach philosophy, justice, morality, virtue, religion. The old poets compared friendship to love as marriage of mind between

<sup>1</sup> *A Review of Hamlet* (Baltimore, 1870).

<sup>2</sup> *The Sonnets of Sh. Solved* (1870).

man and woman—wedlock of the purest type. Shakespeare consummated this by the allegorical marriage of his friend to his Muse. There was also an autobiographical meaning in the Sonnets; and, besides, they were satires on the sonneteers of the day.

### III

TO H. T. Hall<sup>1</sup> Shakespeare was the genius of humanity who portrayed the whole of life. He himself was truly moral, though he had no direct moral purpose, but teaches by example, which is the highest form of art. If at times he involved innocent and guilty alike in common ruin, so is it in life. He wrote for the whole human race, and excelled Homer and Dante in fancy, imagination, philosophy, knowledge, and truth to nature. He does not make men the sport of fate like Aeschylus, but recognizes the human heart to be the seat of the government of mankind. He was absolute master over all moods of human passion and the manners of different ages and countries—Athens, Rome, Egypt, semi-barbarous Britain, Italy. He did not draw his characters from life; they sprang up in himself. He perceived the external laws of human life, and these were his moving power. He produced from his inner life vast problems of humanity yet to be solved. He had all styles, not one, and a language unequalled for copiousness. No one character expresses his personality; it readily passed into the character he sought to develop. His characters mutually work on each other, and here is the true unity—that of feeling. It would be false delicacy to parade his few errors.<sup>2</sup>

Hamlet cannot act because he thinks too precisely and is too intellectual. Destiny brings about the catastrophe, in a world governed by Necessity. Hamlet does not believe in the future; his scepticism removes much of the play's obscurity.<sup>3</sup> He doubts all, and this leads him through scepticism to materialism. The *Merchant* shows a thorough understanding of Venice and the Venetians. It was the only city in Europe where a dream of our common humanity could be indulged in with dramatic truth. Shakespeare's great love of humanity made him portray Shylock fairly. With infinite wisdom he inculcates a great law of humanity which owns the wickedness as well as shows the folly of revenge. Antonio seeks no revenge; his gentle nature overcomes his harsh religious training. *Timon* is said to reflect Shakespeare's own darker mood: but this does not consist with the character of one who above all expresses his untiring love and belief in humanity. In *A.Y.L.* we see the various phases of human character which go to make up the world. Youth revels in displaying that secret chord of harmony which, under the name of love, binds all hearts together. Jaques is a pretender, who can only describe, and not act. His moral lessons are

<sup>1</sup> *Sh. Fly-Leaves and Jottings*, 1871.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Giles.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Miles.

words only, and convey no feeling. Celia, though in the background, is as gifted as Rosalind.<sup>1</sup>

*Macbeth* with an ordinary writer would have been a chamber of horrors. Shakespeare has so roused associations with the beautiful and pure that none but healthful and pleasurable emotions are felt. Macbeth constantly needs support—from his wife or the Witches. Lady Macbeth goes straight to her purpose, and lets nothing else prevail. This makes her strong, because she sees only the end and cares nothing for the means. But she has never reflected and weighed the consequences, and when the action ceases her brain gives way. The Weird Sisters, like humanity, are governed by the laws of Necessity. Fate rules here as in *Hamlet*.

King John's cares and troubles are not personal, but national. The characters are exquisitely grouped; and the moral is that no appeal to foreign power can heal domestic wounds. The hatred of Bolingbroke and Norfolk in *Richard II* is typical, and the forerunner of civil war. Richard's failings are common to humanity; their universality excites our sympathy. The loss of kingly dignity destroys his overweening vanity and teaches him to look within. The good and bad characters are bound up in each other, and we see the means, which the advances of civilization prove, whereby the condition of humanity has been and can be bettered. Richard III's mental superiority gives irony to all his utterances. His intellectual hypocrisy enables him to conceal his aims and hoodwink others. In *A. and C.* vice is not made attractive. Animal passion, apart from affection, pervades the whole tragedy. Otherwise it equals the greatest. . . .

Perhaps Hall understates the part played by fate in Shakespeare, but otherwise his is one of the fairest general estimates that we have met with so far. He feels the immensity of his subject, and treats it in the agnostic manner that is the most becoming. When he applies his theories, he is at his best in the *Merchant*, *A.Y.L.*, and *Richard II*, and least good in *Timon* and *A. and C.*

#### IV

WALTER PATER<sup>2</sup> notes that in *M. for M.* Shakespeare remodelled an earlier play, but concentrated on certain parts rather than the whole. These select parts rise above all but his best poetry, and express his most characteristic morality. It remains a comedy, but is full of all that is most tragic in man's life. He has refashioned the original material with a higher motive, and by means of his own complex philosophy given the unity of true human propriety to its varied incidents. The imperfect relics of the old story are not wholly transformed; the work is rather the preparation of a more imposing design. It is suggestive; it makes the reader's mind work beyond the immediate scope of the

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Cowden Clarke.

<sup>2</sup> *M. for M.*, 1874; *L.L.L.*, 1878 (*Appreciations*).

work. It presents mere human nature: a group of persons full of desire to live, and behind them, the sense of a strong tyranny of nature and circumstance. The characters are strongly contrasted, never ill-natured, capable of many friendships and true dignity in danger. The Duke, Isabella, and also Mariana, are a relief to this lust and pride of life. To the Duke is revealed clearly the strange practical paradox of our life, so unwise in its eager haste. Of Angelo, who may even be most psychologically possible, Shakespeare has made a subtle study in casuistry.

However, the main interest lies in the relations between Claudio and Isabella. The effect of swift vindictive anger on Isabella is that she develops a new character. Ardent natural affection turned to hatred adds to the horror of the prison scene, and produces that terror which is one of the notes of Shakespeare's romanticism. Stimulated by anger she utters some of the finer judgements of the piece on men and things. Claudio is a flower-like young man, who finds his life forfeited as if by the chance of a lottery. He utters the concentrated expression of the recoiling flesh.

Traces of the old 'morality' give the play a peculiar ethical interest. This interest bows to artistic law and cannot be separated from the special circumstances of this dramatic group. The lesson here is that the moral world is intricate and subtle, its true relations are hard to seize, and fair judgements hard to make. The play makes us conceive of poetical justice and yearn to realize it. Angelo knows nothing of this justice that lies outside the law. Justice involves rights, and rights are equivalent to facts; therefore to recognize rights is to recognize what a person really is. As this is a matter of feeling and thought it can only be done by sympathy—and so true justice is a finer knowledge through love. For this finer justice, a true respect of persons in our estimate of actions, the characters of the play cry out. It is an epitome of Shakespeare's moral judgements. Poetry does not always expound morality, but true justice depends on those finer appreciations which poetry cultivates in us the power of making.

The dramatic interest of *L.L.L.* is slight, but suffices to form the vehicle of its wit and poetry. The unity of the play is that of a series of pictorial groups; the same persons are combined over and over again into a series of scenes. The matter that concerns Shakespeare is the foppiness of deliberate language—the fashionable plaything of his time. We see its different grades in Holofernes, Armado, Biron. The fancy for exquisite and curious skill in the use of the words satisfies a real instinct in our minds. What is vulgarity in Holofernes and caricature in Armado becomes in Biron the desire for delicate perfection. He is not out of touch with realities, but even at his best he is never without a certain artifice. Perhaps even more in Shakespeare's slighter characters than his grander ones we detect self-portraiture—those that are

drawn with peculiar happiness and delicate ease—figures which above all are winningly attractive. Such are both Biron and Mercutio—versatile, mercurial people who make good actors. . . .

These essays are as typical of Pater's method as his most famous page of criticism on *Mona Lisa*. He sees his object—no less when it is a play—like a picture, and meditates upon it till the obvious explanations fall aside and the inner reality remains. He has little real but much imaginative experience of life, and this gives him interest in the soul of each character in its moments of self-interrogation rather than in the combined outer dramatic play. Himself he assumes the part of spectator, but no detached and impersonal spectator, because the world of imagination to him is real. The effect is that of a changed light over the Shakespearian landscape, making clear and vivid what is distant, though emphasizing, not denying, the fact of distance, because the scene is once removed from ordinary life: as death may be remote, but is certain—if the figure be not too strong.

Perhaps in the end we think rather of the critic than of his subject, and yet his is at least one of the true paths whereby to approach the goal. It leads us within sight of the unity of Shakespeare—the core of poetry which everything else subserves, including his philosophy. Pater's mind was Platonic, with a craving for the absolute; he was first impressed by external beauty—and he brooded over colours and forms and groups, often seen through the refining veils of medieval romance, with which he had draped his classicism, till they became symbols of the idea. With him the study of Shakespeare leads to the conviction that beauty is truth.

## V

THE object of Edward Dowden's well-known book<sup>1</sup> is to approach Shakespeare on the human side, to pass through the creation of the artist to the mind of the creator. We may gain something by study of the age in which he lived. The Elizabethan scorned other-worldliness; to him this earth seemed a good thing. He loved pomp and tried to make life splendid, and thought that noble character should be developed for active uses. Rich feeling for concrete fact was common to Bacon, Hooker, and Shakespeare—the three greatest minds in science, religion, and literature. The Elizabethan drama gives the stuff of life itself; character is the only fate; and the one standing miracle is the actual world. It has ethical effect without ethical tendency. It is not religious if religion stands over and above human life—but it is if the facts of the world are themselves sacred.

Shakespeare lived in two worlds; he recognized that external duties were real, and he did not disdain worldly prosperity. But he also brooded passionately over what cannot be known. He felt the supreme

<sup>1</sup> *Sh.—His Mind and Art*, 1875.

problems too greatly to offer to explain them. He confronts us with the stupendous mysteries of existence, and because he saw furthest he knew the depths could not be fathomed. His quick worldly success shows that he was faithful to fact and could adapt himself to the world. He was conscious of two dangers, both of which argue departure from fact—passion and brooding thought—as with Romeo and Hamlet.

Unlike Marlowe or Milton he felt his way slowly, and required the evidence of objective facts to give him self-confidence. At first the characters in his plays balance each other by a kind of geometrical arrangement. He aims at unity less by inspiration of common life than disposition of parts. In the later plays one living force animates the whole. The lesson of *L.L.L.* is that we must found on realities because men have appetites and passions, and perfect culture should include, through experience, the senses and affections. Theseus in *M.N.D.* is magnificent, and a heroic man of action, but admired from the outside by the man of thought. Work on historical plays consolidated the relation between Shakespeare's imagination and the actual world. He had to labour to shape the tough clay of historical fact artistically; and he began to inquire into the sources of power and weakness, success and failure in a man's dealing with the positive social world. His portraits were a series of studies of weakness and strength to attain kingly ends, and the supreme sin is to fail.<sup>1</sup> Henry VI had better have been a man than a timid saint. Henry V is Shakespeare's ideal of the practical heroic character, but not his highest ideal. After the histories came *A.Y.L.*, where Jaques is interested not in the world as it is, but as it mirrors itself in his own mind. Isabella in *M. for M.* learns that in the world may be found a discipline more strict and awful than in a convent. To Helena of *All's Well* infinite virtue and significance reside in a *deed* or accomplished fact.

Neither Romeo nor Hamlet can maintain the will fruitfully related to facts and the real world. Through Romeo's love for Rosaline we discern the law that the strength of a feeling depends partly on the force of its external cause. Shakespeare knew the more we penetrate into fact the more will our nature be quickened, enriched, exalted. In Romeo we see a man delivered from dream to reality. The Friar is no chorus, because Shakespeare did not believe the highest wisdom could be acquired by monastic meditation. The central idea of the play is that to die under certain conditions may be a higher rapture than to live.

Shakespeare created *Hamlet* a mystery, and therefore it is for ever suggestive. Hamlet must assert moral order in a morally confused world. He is made for honesty, yet compelled to use shifts and strata-gems, and so wastes himself. He loses sense of fact because each object

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Kreyssig.



and event had transformed itself into an idea. A long course of thinking had destroyed his power to believe; he cannot adjust the infinite to the finite and make real to himself the actual world. What matter if he return to Wittenberg or stay here! The Queen's show of thirty years' love had proved to be without reality. Ophelia could neither receive great gifts of soul nor render equivalent gifts. He must write down the Ghost's words to make sure. All is rotten in Denmark, including its religion. The Church reluctantly sends representatives to Ophelia's funeral, and the Priest utters all that the occasion suggests of harsh, formal, and inhuman dogmatics.

To Shakespeare the life of his inmost being imported more than his work as artist. His study of history helped him to build up his moral nature. He knew his own weaknesses—excessive passion and thought—and resolved to master them. We call him kind and tolerant, but he was unsparingly just and true to fact, and asked much of human character. In the histories the world is the limited one of the practicable, and the question is, What have you done? Evil is wrong-doing followed by retribution. John knows he has no just title to reign and tries to turn away his eyes from facts. He dare not gaze into his own cowardly soul. A feeble saint like Henry VI was a curse to England only less than an equally weak criminal. He is happy in prison because responsible for nothing. Richard III feels the need to let loose on the world the forces within him. He inverts the moral order, but dashes himself to pieces against the laws of the world. Life is a show to Richard II, and calamity no more real to him than prosperity. Henry IV succeeds because he is strong and finite, wedded to his end, and patient of the means. But he has no genius of heart, obtains the love of no man, and is never free from care, so his success is not complete. Henry V is Shakespeare's ideal practical man. As a youth he had entered into the fun of Eastcheap—had escaped from court conventions to the teeming vitality of the London streets—but had kept himself untainted by what is really base. His central element was noble realization of fact, so he could dispense with prudence and artificial proprieties. Through union with the vital strength of the world he becomes one of its most glorious and beneficent forces. When he takes the crown it is with no aesthetic feeling for the situation. He dismisses Falstaff as he turned away his former self. His anger is terrible because impersonal; he awfully discovers high realities that evoke the loyalty in the traitors' hearts.

*Hamlet* was the point of departure for Shakespeare's immense and final sweep of mind. In tragedy the problem is spiritual: success means perfected life of the soul, failure its ruin. All the more because he had mastered the world in a practical way was his mind open to profounder spiritual problems. He now united utmost imaginative susceptibility with utmost self-control. Passion, thought, humour, pathos, severity,

tenderness, knowledge, guess—all work with the imagination. He had established the relation between his soul and the dark and terrible forces of the world. The struggle is between good and evil in the world. Evil exists on the earth—Iago—but so does redeeming ardour—Cordelia. He does not ask how, but leaves you in the solemn presence of a mystery. The supreme fact is that the moral world is independent of the sensible. Cordelia dies, but she has existed,<sup>1</sup> and we can dispense with lesser happiness if granted the joy of the presence of beautiful heroic souls. Absolute despair to Shakespeare is despair of human virtue—Timon—and to this he never yielded. His faith in goodness was never so strong and sure as in this period. With every fresh discovery of crime he discovered virtue which cannot be defeated—Horatio, Kent, Cordelia, Desdemona. The knowledge of evil and good grow together.

Othello feels himself unskilled to deal with the complex and subtle conditions of life in his adopted country. The romance is too stupendous, torrid, alien for Desdemona, and it is no wonder she feared to admit loss of the handkerchief. The central spiritual contrast is between Iago and Othello. Incapacity for noble pain is worse than suffering, and Othello's prolonged agony is joy compared with the earthly life-in-death of Iago. No supernatural authority is needed to witness this reality of human life. The Witches in *Macbeth* remind us that the history of our race and our social medium have created forces of good and evil independent of the individual's will. The sins of past centuries taint the atmosphere of to-day, and we cannot free ourselves from the large impersonal life of the world. Terrible sympathy exists between evil within and without; the morally enfeebled nature succumbs to the germs of disease—as we see in the contrast between Macbeth and Banquo. Macbeth's imaginative remorse is worth little; it makes him miserable, but cannot restrain him from crime. In *Lear* Shakespeare opposes the presence and influence of evil not by transcendental denials of it, but by the presence of virtue, fidelity, self-sacrificing love. We feel that evil is abnormal and self-destroying.<sup>2</sup> Kent believes in nothing above fortune, yet clings to the instinct of right-doing.

In the Roman plays we note that history has now become tragedy, and the moral interest is supreme. Brutus is predestined to fail, yet he preserves his moral integrity. Shakespeare was stern but tender to idealists: they fail, but we love them. Caesar proves that if a man loses relation with fact he may become to himself legendary and mythical. But his spirit triumphs, and the contrast is between his weak bodily presence and mighty spirit. In *A. and C.* we see that there is a law above power, beauty, and pleasure. This sensuous infinite is but a dream and deceit. He is too impartial to deny glory of lust of eye and

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Bradley.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Bradley, and also Rötcher (1864).

pride of life, but he adds that another fact tests the visible pomp of earth and splendour of sensuous passion and finds them wanting. The struggle in *Coriolanus* is of the hero with himself, and he is destroyed by self-will.

Shakespeare's humour played the deciding part in his spiritual development. He was impartial and let no side of a fact escape him. He was not aloof, but so interested in his subject that he wished to do justice to every side of it. His tragedy is more tragic because surrounded by the common realities of life. Tragic incongruity is from the disproportion between the world and man's soul. Life is too small for the soul and man's infinite desires: Romeo would love infinitely and there he lies dead. Comic incongruity is disproportion between some souls and this very ordinary world: Polonius's knowledge of the world falls ludicrously short of what true knowledge is. This kind of humour prevents shrill intensity, because it measures the world by absolute standards. Compare the different ways of looking at Ophelia's death.

In Shakespeare's first tentative period there was no vital connexion between his soul and the graver realities of life. Comic, tender, serious exist side by side but do not interpenetrate. In the second Shakespeare enters into vital union with the real life of the world. The humour in *John* breaks out energetically, in defiance of the dignity of history. Falstaff is hardly less complex and wonderful than Hamlet, and by no means purely comic. His central principle is that facts and laws of the world may be evaded or defied by means of wit or ingenuity. In the end fact presses in relentlessly upon him. The humour of the third period is tragic and terrible. *Lear* shows complete interpenetration of humorous and pathetic. The indignant mood culminates in *Timon*, and the *Tempest* expresses ideally the pathetic yet august serenity of the final period. There was a Timon in Shakespeare; the invariably bright, gentle, genial Shakespeare is a myth. He succeeded in ordering his material life, and also in harmonizing with highest facts and laws his spiritual being. Timon's goodness was indiscriminating, and Shakespeare knew real goodness has some severity in it. Yet he sympathizes with Timon rather than Alcibiades, as he had preferred Hamlet to Fortinbras. The last plays are united by a romantic element; extremes of broad humour and tragic intensity are avoided; and the key-word is reconciliation. The temper of Prospero is characteristic of Shakespeare in his latest plays—harmonious and fully developed will. He has attained complete self-possession; he has reached the height whence he can survey the whole of human life and see how small and yet how great it is. . . .

Dowden is admitted to be in the front rank of Shakespearian critics, and the present work was for many years the most widely read appreciation of Shakespeare. With his beautiful thoughts freshly written down it is hard to play a fault-finding part, and yet the duty of the historical

critic is to re-criticize, and point out those places which have not stood the test of time. No one will quarrel with Dowden's central theory—that the soul is stimulated, not degraded, by its contact with earthly things—that this earth is one rung of the ladder whereby the soul attains to heaven. He succeeds in plunging his whole being into Shakespeare's—where many critics in the past have failed, as we have noted. His mind has this much of Shakespearian quality, that all that is best in it has been roused to the work of interpretation—and nothing suffices him but the highest ideal standard. The result is that his first reaction is of the finest quality, and herein lies the permanent value of his work; but his second thoughts, when he seeks to apply his theory, are on a lower plane. His virtues are his own—his faults those of his time: for criticism was then given to make positive statements, often imperfectly related to experience.

We think that Dowden, having conceived his theory—that the external world plays a part in developing the soul—proved it too minutely. Is it true that the Friar in *R. and J.* is not fitted to act as chorus, or that Macbeth's imaginative remorse is worth little? The impersonal anger of a man of action no doubt is terrible, and such a one would easily discard a former friend such as Falstaff: but does this echo Shakespeare's thought? Time has added little to our knowledge of Shakespeare's biography, but has raised a doubt as to his entire authorship of the plays, and taught us much about the needs of an Elizabethan audience. We are therefore sceptical about the 'four periods' into which Dowden divides Shakespeare's life: and yet he has done well to state his belief. So pure is his first inspiration that something of an afterglow lights up his less certain work. An honest reader of his book will look back upon it as a landmark; his ideas on Shakespeare, if not revolutionized, will be ordered and classified as never before: classified in no scientific sense, but according to Platonic rules of beauty. Our last word is that Dowden teaches more about Shakespeare's art than his mind. The distinctions he draws between comedy, history, tragedy, romance are memorable, because inspired by deep aesthetic emotion; and this emotion lights up by reflection the biographical equivalents which he seems to discover, so that they are at least to be reckoned with, if not proven.

## VI

A. W. WARD<sup>1</sup> is one of those first-rate critics who combine great taste and learning. He treats Shakespeare from the historical point of view, and he so handles the facts of history that we see how they helped to develop the individual genius of Shakespeare. He tells us that Shakespeare first touched the centre of national life when the tide of full action had set in at last. The whole nation was united, and a

<sup>1</sup> *A History of English Dramatic Literature*, 1875 (Macmillan, 1899).

Catholic—Lord Howard—led the attack on the Armada. It inspired a bold and uncompromising patriotism in Shakespeare and encouraged the breadth of view which has confounded endeavours to identify him with one or other sect. Public taste controlled the dramatists; the greatness of England was a living reality; and the English historical drama expressed directly the nation's historic sense. If not inner unity, there is inner cohesion in Shakespeare's histories. The limits of action are determined by the design to reproduce a definite chapter of national annals. Henry V was a genuine national conception. Shakespeare took the King from Holinshed, and left aside the nicer analysis of moral qualities—in obedience to the people's instinct with its chosen heroes. In the Roman plays, sympathies with individuals were, in politics, as part of ethics, controlled by deference to principles of law and order, not from force, but as freely acknowledged in the interest of concord. Shakespeare follows Plutarch as closely as Holinshed, but more clearly impresses the great artistic lesson of the true dramatic treatment of historical themes. In English history national prejudices remain sacred to him, but here he palliates the murder of Caesar and gives a human excuse for Antony's moral impotence.

Equally informing is Ward's analysis of the romantic comedy of Shakespeare and its debt to the Renaissance, though, perhaps, his historical sense overbears his psychological. It might be suggested that if Shakespeare touched human problems more lightly in his early plays, something was due to his youth as well as to his purpose. Ward points out that a feature of Italian culture after the Renaissance was co-operation of the academic and popular. Shakespeare achieved radiant perfection in *M.N.D.*, where the element of character is present, but lightly and easily treated, and the public craving for incident is satisfied. Shakespeare does not deal in the pure character of comedy—like Aristophanes and Molière—except, perhaps, in the *Merry Wives* and *Shrew*—nor in the comedy of manners. His comedy is of incident, but of a peculiar kind—romantic. Though removed from control of moral or social laws, the poet's art wins our sympathy for the persons. In *M.N.D.* he most achieves the end of all dramatic and literary art. He aims to produce a group fit to carry out his eccentric plot. They have enough realism to contrast with the fairy world, but are no character-types. The various groups, including fairies, are machinery for sustaining the interest of the action. In later years he returns to this romantic comedy of incident—viz. the *Winter's Tale*, where Leontes cannot be accounted for psychologically. In the *Merchant* the casket story is romantic, and the story of the Jew romantic in origin; but here Shakespeare makes incident subserve character, and Shylock grows to a tragic hero.<sup>1</sup> In *Twelfth-Night* the pathos of Viola is all but tragic; and the fanciful scenes of *A.Y.L.* are peopled with characters of

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Bradley.

directest human truthfulness. In the early romantic comedies characterization is introduced incidentally rather than as part of the play. It begins and ceases in quick obedience to the fancy of the poet, who aims to remove the spectators from real life, so need not exemplify the moral laws which rule life. In the end the *Tempest* united incident and character.

Perhaps Ward's strokes tell less when he puts history aside and is face to face with the impression—though it is not to be disputed that his aesthetic sense was impeccable. Thus he acknowledges that Shakespeare had unequalled power of characterization, the greatest of all dramatic qualities; but he then says that when the climax is reached, interest in the hero is raised so high that to supply the required incident between climax and catastrophe, characters and scenes have to be introduced which detract from the effect of the concluding portion; and he finds less interest in the last two acts not only of *Hamlet*, but of *Lear* and *Coriolanus*. History again serves him when he credits Shakespeare with immense advance over his predecessors: the best constructed of Marlow's dramas being more episodic than the earliest of Shakespeare's histories. And, with a glance at quite modern criticism, we respect his saying, that Hamlet, Shakespeare's truest and deepest character, was conceived on a broader basis than the action of the play furnishes, and the play is forgotten in the hero.

## VII

THE volumes of Francis Jacox<sup>1</sup> are worth sifting for some fine moral distinctions which they contain; and the moral, with him, is not isolated from the aesthetic, but the two work together towards a higher unity. He can better appreciate Shakespeare for being versed in Shakespearean criticism; and the judgements of others which seem to him either wrong or inadequate often stimulate his mind to judge for itself and surpass them. His analysis of Othello's dual nature may not be the whole truth, but it is worth pondering.

At the outset he pronounces Shakespeare to be profoundly moral in the essence of his work. Only from the Fool can Lear bear to hear the truth, and the Fool interprets to us Lear's sensitive tenderness beneath his impatience. Lear and Cordelia do not perish till their destiny is fulfilled. His work of love and duty is done, and he has revived to reason and regained his daughter. Hotspur's errors cannot disfigure the majestic image of his noble youth. His fiery spirit carries us away when we would most censure it. Falstaff has the sense of danger but not the discomposure of fear, and will only fight as long as he sees the reason for it. We do not feel the same distrust and dislike for Mistress Quickly as for the Nurse in *R. and J.* Hermione unites gentleness and power—perfect mental grace of the antique kind, that of repose. She

<sup>1</sup> *Sh. Diversions*, 1875.

gives the effect of suffering without passion, and grandeur without effort.

The barbaric element is strong in Othello; the mere physical force of passion puts to flight in one moment all his acquired virtues, and exalts the savage over the moral man. Therefore he suffers doubly—in the higher and lower sphere into which his being was divided. In his passion he does not preserve even the outward proprieties of his station; but when his revenge is done, and the spirit from the desert appeased, he listens to the proofs, apologizes to Cassio, sits in judgement on his own folly and crime, and resumes the calm dignity of a great Venetian leader. The charm of *Hamlet* is its mystery—the mystery of its hero's character regarded but as the type and shadow of the still greater mystery of existence itself. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are alike—exceptions to the rule, and exceptions which prove the rule that all Shakespeare's characters are individuals.

## VIII

FLEAY'S work<sup>1</sup> contains little aesthetic criticism, but we present a few notes because they typify the opinion of the age: that Shakespeare could do no wrong; and that his life and art had periods, to be explained by each other.

Shakespeare wrote the story of Marina in the last three acts of *Pericles*, omitting the prose scenes and the speeches of Gower—but he did not write the brothel scenes. The sorrows of *L.L.L.*, *M.N.D.*, and the *Errors* are unreal, and excite in us no deep feeling. In *R. and J.* and *Richard II* we regret the events, but have no deep individual sympathy with the characters, such as we feel at the very beginning of the second period with the passionate agony of Constance, the Christian resignation of Antonio, or the logical, though extreme, vengeance of Shylock. We have entered a world of tasks and duties. Fate severs Romeo and Juliet, but duty Portia and Bassanio. At this period there are in Shakespeare's life sorrows enough to account for this—Marlowe's death, and the death of his son. So do his second and third periods end with the deaths of his father and youngest brother.

## IX

F. J. FURNIVALL<sup>2</sup> maintains that Shakespeare's work is all continuous and that there are links between the plays. Like all who approach Shakespeare with a system, he overworks it. Some of his links help us to interpret Shakespeare's mind, others are ingenious or fanciful, others trivial or far-fetched. Himself a genial, positive type of critic, he believes in the four periods, and he emphasizes the moral side of Shakespeare's genius. He scorns the idea that the Sonnets are

<sup>1</sup> *Sh. Manual*, by Frederick Gard Fleay (1876).

<sup>2</sup> *Introduction to Leopold Sh.*, 1877.

dramatic, accepts them as literally autobiographical, and—less austere than Heraud—does not acquit Shakespeare of sin, but allows for the licence of the age, and is convinced that if Shakespeare sinned he repented. To him Shakespeare the man is one with Shakespeare the artist, and the beauty of his character and writings indissolubly bound up. He revered women, and the result was his incomparable gallery of women's portraits. He openly preached his own moral through his historical plays. The zest with which Furnivall calls King John a selfish coward reveals the extra moral weight which he placed in the artistic scale. That there lies in the human deeps a more precious metal than the gold and silver of morals—an aesthetic radium—seemed unknown to all mid-Victorian critics except Pater.

We will first cast an eye over the most helpful of Furnivall's 'links'. The change of masks in *L. L. L.* shows how early Shakespeare thought mistaken identity was the best means of fun. The love of Antipholus for Luciana in the *Errors* is the first uprise of tender love never after absent. The link between the *Errors* and *M. N. D.* is that all the wood scenes of the latter are a comedy of errors. In these plays and *Verona* we get the power of love over man's oaths, and the prevailing subject is the fickleness of love. The temptation scenes of King John and Hubert and Richard III and Tyrrel may be compared. In the *Shrew* Kate is shrewish from neglect, like Adriana in the *Errors*. The result of Falstaff's catastrophe is that we ask ourselves, as at the close of *L. L. L.*, whether wit, which men so value, is of great account. Benedict and Beatrice are developed from Biron and Rosaline; while Hero is a prototype of Hermione: and again the moral is that wit is worthless. *A. Y. L.* looks forward to the final plays where forgiveness is better than revenge. Compare the love-lorn Duke of *Twelfth-Night* to the love-lorn Romeo. Antonio of this play sacrifices himself for his friend like Antonio of the *Merchant*. The choosing of a husband in *All's Well* contrasts with the *Merchant*. Amid the fate of nations and impersonal interests of *J. C.* rings out the cry of a betrayed friend—'*Et tu, Brute!*'—and this continues through all the future plays. Hamlet resembles Brutus, in that the burden to set the world right is imposed on a student. Incontinence appears in *Hamlet* and again in *M. for M.* Isabella is more merciful than Portia, and has the martyr's spirit more than Helena. The play carries on Hamlet's thoughts of life and death. Barnardine refuses to die because he is drunk, and this recalls Hamlet's wish to take his uncle in sin. Claudio even exceeds Hamlet in expressing apprehension of death. Ophelia's fate and song remind us of Barbara's fate and Mariana's and Desdemona's songs. Iago is the Richard III of Shakespeare's third period. Othello's imagination, like Macbeth's, makes the suggestion work with terrible rapidity. Both are great commanders, tempted from within and from without. Ulysses plays on Achilles and Ajax, like Iago on Othello.



Antony prefers his own whims to his country's good, like Achilles; while Cleopatra is the dark lady of the Sonnets. The ingratitude and curses in *Coriolanus* prepare us for *Timon*. Timon would buy love with gifts like Lear—and Alcibiades invades Athens like Coriolanus invades Rome. Apemantus is a third-period Jaques. Miranda and Perdita are typical of Shakespeare's fourth period—reconciliation and forgiveness. Compare them with *M.N.D.* where we see Stratford girls stained with the tempers and vulgarities of their day. As Hamlet was Shakespeare in his restless and unsettled state, so is Prospero in his ripeness and calm, and we see the soul's progress. Paulina (*W. Tale*) is a truer Emilia (*Othello*).

The following are links of the border-line. Valentine's reproach to Proteus recalls Theseus (*M.N.D.*). In both *John* and *Richard III* are cruel uncles and distracted mothers. Falconbridge explains his motives like Richard his villainy. Portia is a mean between Beatrice and Viola. Both *John* and the *Merchant* are life-plea plays. In the latter, as in the *Shrew*, there is the self-surrender of a woman. Prince Henry's madcap humours are like Petruchio's. Henry IV's speech on sleep may be compared with Macbeth's. In *A.Y.L.*, as in *L.L.L.*, there is the same childish love of a girl to torment her sweetheart by assuming disguises, and also the writing of verses by lovers. It has the link of an enchanted land with *M.N.D.* Antony's character of Brutus is like Hamlet's of his father. The root of evil in *Othello* and Macbeth is disappointed ambition. Like Desdemona Cordelia subordinates love of father to husband. Characters of *Pericles* and the *Tempest* are supposed drowned, but restored.

And these few are rather below the average of a serious critic. In *Verona* there is a duke and a scene in a wood as in *M.N.D.*, and Julia seeks a husband like Adriana (*Errors*). Speed and Launce correspond with the two Dromios. In *John* the army is lost in the Wash, and in the *Merchant* ships are wrecked on the Goodwin Sands. In Petruchio and Bassanio is the same adventurous spirit; Bianca has rival wooers like Portia; and Grumio's wit and humour is like Falstaff's. Petruchio, like Falconbridge, makes himself appear worse than he is. In *2 Henry IV* the lower rank of people begin to come to the front and prepare the way for the *M. Wives*. In the *Merchant* and *All's Well* there is the parallel of the rings. The lust of Cressida and Helen of Troy is like that of Goneril and Regan; and both pairs of lovers—Troilus and Cressida, and Romeo and Juliet—are awakened by the lark. Hermione links the *W. Tale* with *Henry VIII*, and makes us believe in the link of Shakespeare's work with his reconciliation with his wife.

We conclude with some examples where the moral interest has quickened the aesthetic judgement. In Shylock we only condemn the hate that springs from avarice. Henry IV may not be a hero, but he is a ruler. Falstaff got his deserts, and also the chance to reform. How could Henry V, in the midst of his new state, receive him other-

wise in public? The moral of *J.C.* is: Do not evil that good may come. Shakespeare sympathizes with Timon rather than Alcibiades—as always with the sufferers rather than the practical. . . . Some remarks on *Richard II* and *Richard III* are worth noting, because they give the honest impressions of a critic who had no modern doubts of divided authorship. He complains of the former that rhetoric may verge on rant, and there lacks comic relief; while the whole of the latter seems to him in Marlowe's style, and the curses are especially monotonous.

## X

IN the work of Denton J. Snider,<sup>1</sup> even more than the preceding, Shakespeare becomes the ethical teacher. His language, imagery, constructive ability, even his characterization, have been reached by lesser minds; but he is supremely great because he comprehends and embodies the ethical—that is, the institutional—world. The drama is the most concrete and therefore the highest form of poetry, because it most represents self-determination. The lower and higher in man collide, and this is the source of dramatic action. Shakespeare provides a graded hierarchy of principles, with two grand divisions—Institutional and Moral—Family and State, e.g. man and woman may love, but the will of a parent may come between and cause collision; or the State must punish a bad man though his family suffer—and thus State and Family collide. Above the State is the World—historical spirit—the supreme ethical authority that causes the rise and fall of nations. Yet the internal forces of the soul determine man, not external things. Property, Family, State, World—historical spirit are the principles made real by the individual. He may reject these, and then we enter a new sphere—the moral. Shakespeare is institutional, and sets aside moral duties when they conflict with institutional. The final decision is with universal reason, and the difficulty lies in gradation. Criticism should show the dramatic structure and movement along with dramatic character. The dramatic thread shows the organization of the play; and the threads moving together through one phase of action are the movement. Threads and movements preserve the dramatic structure by dividing the action length and crosswise. In tragedy colliding elements can only be mediated by death, in comedy they can be reconciled. A tragic character must be the bearer of some great ethical end, and only death can dislodge his principles. The higher principle of the ethical world must be shown triumphant. We know it by its universality—it has the essential quality of reason itself. Man must dwell in accord with the ethical world or perish.

The action of *Lear* is within the family, and its contradictory principles produce the conflict. The offending individuals perish because they destroy the condition of their own existence—the family.

<sup>1</sup> *System of Sh.'s Dramas* (St. Louis, 1877).

Gloster's crime against the family has called into being a social contradiction. Inevitably Edmund turns against institutions that make him an outcast. But he ignores the eternal ethical laws of the universe, believes only in his subjective intelligence, and collides with the objective world of spirit. Gloster's own family are disrupted and turned against him. This is the first thread; the second is Lear's tyranny which overbears individual right. The basis of his mind is absolute domination: destroy that basis and the mind's prop is gone. His first collision is with the true people of the court whom he banishes; he makes the world a semblance and will become so himself. The partition scene shows further that he prefers semblance to reality. He has lost his relation to the outer world, and Act III shows the world upside down. The faithless are protected in their wrongs by institutions and sheltered in their palaces from the storm. We reach the extreme negative point short of annihilation. Now follows the reaction—Edgar and Cordelia are true to the family. To restore Lear to his daughter's love and image of respect and power is to remove the ground of insanity. But Cordelia has assailed the State—man's highest ethical institution. Her lofty principle collides with a loftier, and the tragic struggle is not to be mediated. Albany acts with his enemies to preserve the State; and Edgar and Kent avoid collision with the State and survive.

In comedy there need be nothing actually comic, but the end is not death. When an individual is not ready to die for his principle the intensity of his character is gone: Shylock would have been tragic, but he yields. The individual becomes comic when fancies and caprices control him. Disguises and mistakes of identity often mediate. The individual collides with the ethical principle, but is foiled. Situation and character are both in comedy—deception through the senses or delusion from self-deception—e.g. Titania, Malvolio—and the solution is the discovery of the deception. In the comedy of character the retributive nature of the solution is more marked. The solution for the unconscious, involuntary comic character is to be made conscious of its folly through the consequences. The voluntary comic character—Falstaff, Sir Toby, Autolycus—carries its own solution. The outcome of comedy is the dissolution of the whims, absurdities, delusions of the rational person. The fundamental principle of comedy of character is freedom—internal determination of man, responsibility for conduct.

*Twelfth-Night* is a perfect specimen, because the mediation takes place in the same realm as the struggle. All causes are present—situation, character (voluntary and involuntary), resemblance, disguise. The family appears in the emotion which is the forerunner and condition of marriage; the internal obstacle is lack of reciprocal attachment. We see the passage from fruitless and restless passion to the

haven of repose in the family. The different results spring from the logical nature of the different motives of the various characters. The Duke, Viola, and Olivia are the first threads, in all of whom is unrequited love. Olivia's passion for Viola is true love expended on a phantom, and therefore comedy of situation through disguise. In the second thread there is contrast yet similarity—unrequited love of a coarse and prosaic kind. Malvolio desires position and authority rather than love; he is an involuntary comic character, and his delusion is subjective. Sir Toby is a voluntary comic character, and therefore of the highest type, but he comes to an absurd end, for he seeks to make the whole world absurd, so must be included in the fulfilment of his own purpose. Maria wins him through his controlling principle—love of merriment. Sebastian and Antonio are another thread, and introduce comedy of situation; the solution of which is that the two comic agents—resemblance and disguise—fulfil their function. In the end affections are transferred, and the essential element is reciprocal emotion.

The historical drama appeals to patriotism, which makes the individual one with his country. In ordinary drama the deed returns to the doer; in historical it continues to produce its effect for all time. The nation carries it on, and the State also absorbs the family. The Roman spirit was intensely national, and when the change took place to Empire all sank into the unity of the absolute monarch. Caesar unified the whole Roman world. In *A. and C.* a dull uniformity resulted which deadened all vigour of mind and body. Rome obliterated herself by assaults on nationality; the conquered peoples incorporated into her life changed her character. The Empire must be broken up and re-wrought, and here we see the place of *Titus*. The work of the Middle Ages was to restore nationality to Europe. In the collisions of the historical drama the moral is subordinate to the national. But there is retribution—for the great man suffers, though he had to do the evil to realize the infinitely greater good. Collision of State and Family is the most powerful and tragic of all. Also we have the individual State and the world-historical principle. A nation that would conquer another destroys the principle of nationality, and so conflicts with the world-historical movement of the modern age and undermines its own existence. The collision is between national selfishness and national principle. The last collision is that of a State with itself.

*Julius Caesar* reveals Shakespeare's ethical world in its highest form and most accurate gradation. The nation becomes a transitory element in the great movement of universal history. Shakespeare's ethical world consists of Individual, Family, State—graded to prevent collision. Above there is the power which calls the State into being and ends it—God in history. Until the individual vitalizes them they are abstractions; but when a man makes them the basis of action they move the world. Caesar represents the world-spirit—Brutus and

Cassius the spirit of the old Roman constitution. They destroyed Caesar the individual, but not the movement he represented. Caesar saw intellectually the right of the State above any individual right of conscience. Brutus violated the fundamental principle of his nature, his profoundest intellectual conviction. He makes possibility the basis of action and cannot subordinate the various spheres of ethical duty. When they collide he becomes a mass of confusion, and he cannot rise above moral considerations in political affairs. He acts outside his real intellectual convictions, because he does not convince himself. He has no intellectual basis of action: he kills his best friend, yet will not levy money for starving soldiers. He would sacrifice the whole cause to moral punctilio. Antony's highest end is personal devotion to the one he loved. The collision is between the World Spirit and the Nation.

In *1 Henry IV* we see England restored to internal harmony. The King can transform the revolution into a stable government. The two movements are disruption in the State and reaction. Henry's double character appears in the conflicting demands of conscience and State—between the moral and political man. His instinct is to be upright and religious—but let the nation cry out and he will dissemble and use falsehood and violence. Hotspur is doomed because he cannot subordinate himself to the State; he would introduce the foreigner into home quarrels and sacrifice country to party. The merit of the King and Prince is that they support nationality. The Prince is untainted by his low connexions because they are outside his true nature. Falstaff is a rational man acting with conscious irrationality. Comedy culminates in him through his serenity, and he is a voluntary comic character. The Prince unites the nethermost layer of society into the struggle for nationality. The King owed his throne to the Percys, but from political necessity must put them down: he cannot sacrifice the nation to individual scruples. . . .

Such is Snider's theory in outline and as applied to tragedy, comedy, Roman, and English historical plays. From what has already been said about systems of criticism it will be plain that we cannot give it a very hearty welcome. To become a science, he says, criticism must attend to objective realities rather than the caprice of subjective opinion. But surely criticism is an art, not a science, and Snider is repeating the error of the Germans who would harden the aesthetic into the scientific. The duty of the critic is to sink so wide a shaft into the ore-deposits of the classic writer that his own spirit can escape readily into the upper air.

Art is infinite, science finite, and the drawback of Snider's system is that it makes art finite. The impression remains that the institution is more than the soul: thus he says that Lear is made sane not only because he is restored to his daughter's love, but also to some-

thing of his former respect and power. Or a play may import that has no aesthetic merit: for instance, *Titus* has to remake the Empire which the age of Antony and Cleopatra saw shattered. And Ulysses, to him, is more an intellectual hero than Hamlet, because his thought does not destroy itself, but finds itself reflected in the world around him. In *A.T.L.* Shakespeare indicates that the idyllic life is an irrational abstraction—that man's rational existence is in the State and society whose collisions he must endure. Prospero stresses the importance of marriage, and ceremony gives reality to the family. Pater blamed even Dante because he related all things to Hell, Purgatory, or Paradise: and so Snider has walled-in the human soul. Yet we must be fair to him and add that through the soul's longing to escape, which he does show us in spite of himself, its infinite nature becomes clearer. We remember how Thucydides pointed to the small space left incomplete by the investing Athenian wall, and added, 'By so much had Syracuse escaped destruction': and from these few words came a waft of horror. Even so there are times when Snider's elaborate system becomes the means of concentrating the untamed force of a great human spirit.

Thus he tells us that Timon's principle of giving would destroy society; that ethical union between Othello and Desdemona was impossible: for the sake of marriage she violates the condition of marriage; that Lady Macbeth suffered internal retribution because she had unsexed herself—and to unsex the woman is to destroy the woman. In the end reality becomes as terrible to Macbeth as imagination, and he is inwardly a desert because imagination was the centre of his spiritual activity. Hamlet was morality without action, and the King action without morality. Hamlet's world is one-sided with no objectifying will. He has transformed the objective world by passing it through a peculiar mental medium. The mind looks at its own operations—this in turn is a mental process—and so the mind is caught in an infinite series and all action perishes. In the *Merchant* Antonio realizes that man is above property; and Arragon and Morocco fail because they lack the subjective element of love. The *Errors* shows us that if one unit be displaced and another taken for it the whole fabric of society will be disturbed. In *M. for M.* monasticism would make the world holy by destroying it; the chaste Isabella can only solve the difficulty by entirely annihilating the sexual relation. Leontes destroys the end of the State by making Hermione's trial a mockery of justice. Coriolanus is great, but Rome must be rid of him before she can conquer the world; he is as revolutionary as the plebeians, and both would destroy restraining institutions. Octavius is the true Roman who can resist the fascination of the East. Falconbridge is emphasized as illegitimate—that he may be severed from the ethical relation of the family and consecrated to the State. . . .

The above specimens show Snider at his best, but the main impres-

sion from his book is that man was made for institutions, not institutions for man. We repeat that the best critic is he who heightens for us his subject's aesthetic value by expressing thoughts suggested by his own emotion: in which case a critic like Myers, with his essay on Virgil, would head the poll, and Snider, we fear, would forfeit his deposit.

## XI

AMONG these last critics moral and religious views predominate, often expressed in the same words. Miles speaks of Shakespeare's deep spirituality; Brown says that he thought nobly of the soul and believed in its immortality; Hall, that he wrote with no special moral purpose, though his plays abound with true moral passages, but his morality was built on nature and reason independent of religion; Dowden, that the moral order of the universe was a great fact to him, that he clearly perceived concrete moral facts, though, as an artist, he was not interested in truths beyond human experience—yet the Divine Presence was never absent from his world; Ward, that he saw intimations of kinship in our nature to existences governed by laws beyond and above its own; Jacox uses the same words as Dowden, that Shakespeare saw concrete moral facts, but, as artist, neglected alleged truths beyond human experience; Furnivall says that he became convinced of the sternness of the moral ruler of mankind; Snider, that his unique greatness lay in comprehending the ethical order, that knowledge of his ethical world will reveal an all-controlling Justiciary, and no one better understood the concrete nature of religion. Pater discovers his finer poetical justice.

Hall says that he united consummate judgement with highest creative power; Ward, that he united knowledge of human nature with vivid force of imagination, and that he was greatest of all dramatists in the universal humanity of his genius; Dowden, that he reaches ultimate truths of human life and character through supreme and indivisible energy of love, imagination, thought; Fleay, that he was a true-hearted, loving, catholic soul, nearest perfection of all mighty geniuses; Furnivall, that all his attributes were agents of his imagination which made him the greatest poet in the world. His justice, of which Pater speaks, is a finer knowledge through love.

The following are remarks on the characters: Hall's, that they are mutually dependent, and hence the true law of unity—that of feeling; Dowden's, that he had enthusiasm for great personalities; Ward's, that characterization was his supreme gift; Jacox's, that he abounded in strokes of art which distinguished man from man and brought out individual character amid universal brotherhood; Furnivall's, that his penetrative imagination showed him what was at the heart of every man. Jacox says that the men and women of his plays are bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh; and Furnivall remarks on the intensity with

which he threw his whole strong self into his characters. Against these Snider maintains that dramatic architecture reveals Shakespeare more than characterization.

In Dowden's opinion a woman is dearer to Shakespeare than an angel, a man better than a god. He also finds the natures of Shakespeare's women made up of fewer elements than his men, but in juster poise; while to Snider all Shakespeare's women have the trait of subordination to the family. Brown remarks that he had a high, even religious, opinion of friendship. . . .

These critics, except Pater and Dowden, though they wonder at Shakespeare and praise him to the full, do so in conventional terms. But in the two named we see a special manner forming—almost a special vocabulary, to be applied only to Shakespeare by the finest succeeding critics. It means the discovery of an aesthetic solar system, where religion, morals, philosophy, history, manners revolve round the central sun of beauty.



## Chapter XXI

### GERMANY 1867-1872

- I. HEYSE. II. OEHLMANN. III. ANONYMOUS. IV. KUNO FISCHER.  
V. OECHELHÄUSER. VI. VIEHOFF. VII. WERNER. VIII. OECHELHÄUSER.  
IX. KÖMIG. X. ELZE. XI. CONCLUSION.

#### I

PAUL HEYSE<sup>1</sup> considers Antony and Cleopatra to be the complements of each other, and their elevation high above the average of mankind. They are at the zenith of their power, and would be satiated had not the inexhaustible life of the senses endowed them with eternal youth. With both the passion is a final one, which blazes up with all the ardour of a first love. They differ from Romeo and Juliet in being conscious of their state; they reduce their intoxicating revel to a system, and diversify their enjoyments with all the refinement of an exquisite art of living. To the point where Antony deserts Octavia for Cleopatra he resembles other enamoured heroes, and we follow him with sympathy—but when he leaves the naval battle he forfeits the claim to tragic sympathy, which he does not again recover. The psychological problem is too fine for the drama—this conception of a woman whose power is so demoniacal that it mystifies sense and reason. One must seek in the confessions of the Sonnets for the earliest studies of Cleopatra. It is rare to find on the stage an incarnation to justify the hero in holding the gain or loss of a hemisphere as an indifferent matter in comparison with separation from his enchantress. If we can be brought to believe in such an elemental power of passion, then only can we face the shame of the hero, not with disapproval, but with the shock of a horror that every inexorable fate awakens in us. Cleopatra is the greatest masterpiece of female characterization in the whole of romantic literature—the most richly delineated figure, with its psychological analysis and vivid contrasts. Antony is depicted with equal poetic depth and power.

The tragedy is likely to perplex those who would make of Shakespeare a conscientious moralist. He preaches undoubtedly that 'self-indulgence and achievement are incompatible', but a single principle founded on experience cannot claim to be the soul of a whole work. Had the poet thus intended he would have devised a different issue. The heroic, self-indulgent Antony decidedly overshadows his cool, efficient rival. Few would waver in choosing between cold-blooded Caesar and warm-blooded Antony. But if a majority decide that the lovers are criminal, a minority might find solace in being on Shakespeare's side. The dazzling apparition of such a pair animated his

<sup>1</sup> Introduction to trans. of *A. and C.* (ed. Bodenstedt), 1867.

creative power. He was conscious, like his critics, of all that was holy or the reverse in such a tie. He knew the inflexible law that the most highly gifted man succumbs as soon as he would make his will lord of his reason. Incorruptibly honest, he neither concealed nor adorned this; he allowed all that is hateful and mean to unfold itself, but could not have been the poet he is—richly endowed son of Mother Nature—had he not felt relationship with anything noble that she produced. He saw in this pair the powers of luxurious life bloom forth and wither in obedience to the law of all earthly things. Then a tragic pain broke from his heart, and he could not rest until he adorned their grave with all the treasures of poetry, and made their death immortal. . . .

It is to the credit of Heyse that he feels the mystery which he cannot solve. He is preoccupied with outer events; he cannot forgive Antony for deserting his army—and no doubt the thought is present to his mind of how such conduct would compare with a similar breach of discipline in the German army of his day. But he is indistinctly aware of laws other than earthly by which such a passion as that between Antony and Cleopatra is justified, though human conventions suffer. Full understanding is only given to those whose ears are attuned to the magical Shakespearian rhythm.

## II

W. OEHLMANN<sup>1</sup> is puzzled by Cordelia's fate, considering that, knowing her father's nature, she sinned but lightly in neglecting to meet him with a few kindly words. The explanation is that she is innocent as the dove, but has not the wisdom of the serpent. Her cunning sisters know how to deal with their father, but she loves and is silent. Again, her father's welfare, not ambition, makes her prepare for war. As she does not go into battle to punish her sisters the fight is purposeless, or at least undertaken without clear object. It is not made to be a factor in large affairs or lead to great undertakings, and it is only feeble comfort, when it ends in imprisonment, to know that she is not the first who, wishing well, has suffered most.

She is short-sightedly honest and inflexible, and did not display necessary prudence—but is lack of understanding a tragic crime? The crime is merely imperfection of certain powers of mind in relation to others more strongly developed. These weaker powers may be either of temperament (feelings) or the understanding, but all powers should be developed in proportion. Macbeth, for instance, may have silenced his reason rather than his conscience: for only thus could he have been appeased by the doubtfully worded prophecies. The disharmony is between the powers of reasoning and feeling: where harmony exists the man does not fail but goes down heroically, not tragically. Cordelia, endowed with every virtue of feeling, becomes

<sup>1</sup> 'Cordelia as a Tragic Character' (*Jahrbuch*, 1867).

tragic because her reasoning failed. It would have been more unbearable in a man, for we require a man to act with judgement; and only when blinded by an extreme passion does he become a tragic character. A woman, on the contrary, may be tragic if she shows enough depth of feeling, apart from intelligence. A poet need seldom call in aid an overwhelming passion.

We conclude that deep feeling would have sufficed Cordelia had not her lot fallen among such uncommon disturbances. She owed her downfall as much to surroundings as character. It increases our fear and pity to see the failings of tragic characters brought to light by circumstances. We recognize in Cordelia one marked out for the tragic fate which she fulfils. . . .

Oehlmann speaks the truth, but he is uninspired. He analyses correctly, but purely analytic criticism misses the spirit of such a work as *King Lear*.

### III

AN anonymous writer<sup>1</sup> distinguishes *Hamlet* from the other plays because it lays bare a human soul in its totality; it does not merely give the history of a passion or develop some better or worse feature of character. When Hamlet is excited by his imagination or by some event in the outer world he lets the immediate reality escape him, and, seizing on an idea, is possessed by it to the oblivion of his surroundings. When awaiting the Ghost he discourses on the Danish drinking customs; and he lectures the players on acting, regardless of his design. In monologues he generalizes wide of the special occasion. The inner world is more real to him than the outer; he constantly withdraws into it; and the effect of meditation is to tranquillize. His thought is not a pithy sketch for the solid structure of doing, but in itself a complete picture of great beauty. As soon as it comes into contact with men and the world it is troubled. He is a stranger in this outside world, and according as his inner man is upset by it the inner beauty disappears, and in its place comes an enigmatical darkness, often hiding in its depth good and bad in confused intermingling. When violently moved he does not react in word or deed, but tries to evade his emotion and to hide it under sarcastic and cryptic words. Wit and spirit play like an arabesque around the direct thought. The so-called madness is a purposeful gradation of this weakness of character and power of intellect. Real derangement of thought he would have feigned badly, for with all his disordered speech there never lacks strict logical connexion.

After the ghost scene his exclamations are irrelevant, and reveal the utter lack of deliberation and aim of a man in the highest state of excitement. In meditations and monologues he cradles himself to

<sup>1</sup> 'Hamlet's Traits of Character', by a Non-Philosopher (*Jahrbuch*, 1867).

rest; and not only does confusion arise from his passionate emotion, but darker passions, unnatural to him in his collected state. He is an idealist, and in peace strives after the idea in thought and feeling—but all such visions fade when thronged and hunted by life. Mean and ugly moods arise when he is thrown off his natural course, and he has no time to collect his moral strength. Ophelia's funeral interrupts his moralizing over man's destiny, and all lofty contemplation goes to the winds in a fit of jealousy and vanity. This and the nunnery scene after the 'To be' soliloquy reveal the dark shadows that accompany the luminous loftiness of the idealist. When abnormally overcome by emotional agitation he is carried beyond the bounds of his natural disposition. In the storm of anger against his mother he sweeps away Polonius, and he kills the King in a fit of anger at his treachery. Both are deeds of overwhelming excitement, chance happenings, widely distinguished from predetermined deeds.

He certainly does appear hard of feeling, indifferent to Polonius's death and Ophelia's madness. It may be that he has over-estimated his task—great as it is and wrapped in the illusion of a higher call—and that he recklessly pursues his way, like a clumsy artist wasting his materials. The important goal excuses in his eyes all faults committed; yet his disposition does not seem hard or cruel. He loves and honours his father; trouble at his mother's ill-doing is rooted in his love for her; with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern he appeals to memories of old friendship; and he is bound by a firm tie to Horatio. His relations with Ophelia were not of long standing; her love had yet to be tested, and it failed. As soon as the struggle begins about his imposed task he bids her farewell; he reflects over her nature, and, sighing, tears himself away. He clearly expresses the estrangement when he speaks to her cutting words before the King and her father. At her grave the lament of Laertes troubles his moral vanity more than his conscience: he was jealous that Laertes should continue to love his sister when he had ceased to do so. Had he still loved her he would have broken out in grief himself, and the brother's grief would not have hurt his pride. He is callous like the idealist who follows visionary paths, undisturbed by events outside his inner life.

In deciding whether Ophelia loved Hamlet we must consider her family and surroundings—the formal manners, the atmosphere of semi-vice and semi-virtue. . . . She could not enter into Hamlet's moods and struggles; she was rather won by his exalted position. His name never occurs in all her mad ravings. The development of Hamlet's character is the main theme of the play, and she stands apart from it. She lacks power to break through the bonds of the ordinary. When he enters her room as one in deep affliction and takes leave of her she runs off to tell her father, and can show no independent interest in her lover.

Hamlet's fate is tragic because he is richly gifted, yet stands a stranger in the outer world. Shakespeare could not set characters of passion as a foil to such a nature, but only ordinary beings—Polonius, the Queen, Ophelia. Even the King is no extraordinary criminal. He is composed, wary, self-possessed, perfectly aware of his crime and his feeble repentance, which does not prevent him from enjoying what he has gained. At times he seems to feel that he has a right to it. He has no inner nobility that shrinks with horror from what is bad and base, and the lack of this places him in the rank of the ordinary. Not only the characters, but the whole atmosphere round Hamlet is that of an ordered court and quiet circumstances: there is even a bourgeois tone in the relations of the royal pair. Such an atmosphere would make doubly discomposing the bizarre, restless, uncertain behaviour of the Prince, and alienate those about him. In his own being lay the core of his tragic fate. . . .

We do not agree that the effect of Hamlet's meditations is to tranquillize; nevertheless, the critic conveys to us something of the power of his mind, by defining after a fashion the beauty of his thought, and the nature of his surrounding world. He feels the disharmony between Hamlet himself and his actions—a disharmony, as we are now aware, between plot and character, between a philosophic hero and a tragedy of revenge. But with the knowledge at his disposal he has made a tolerable suggestion for this disharmony, and one that preserves the unity of the play—viz. that overcome by the greatness of his task Hamlet recklessly pursued his way, and killed Polonius and disregarded Ophelia. He also makes us realize something of Hamlet's exclusive nature and far-reaching thought by discovering its reactions: for instance, his most violent outbursts follow his profoundest soliloquies.

#### IV

KUNO FISCHER<sup>1</sup> decides that character comes first with Shakespeare, whence passions and actions. It cannot be said of him what Aristotle said of the Greeks—that the story is the chief thing in the drama. Aristotle thought character need only be developed enough to account for the described action, and that it inclined to represent the type. Shakespeare's characters are not types, and his characterization goes deeper. With him character develops and becomes more all-embracing, and appears as the only spring of action, its ultimate and innermost cause. Each character, therefore, is a distinct individual, and he surpasses other playwrights in making his characters dramatically alive. Richard III proves this above all.

His fundamental trait is thirst for power, and in this Shakespeare and history agree. Led by this absorbing passion Richard destroys his own house and also the Lancastrians. Shakespeare departs from

<sup>1</sup> *Richard III*, 1868.

history in making Richard slay Henry in the Tower, and take part in the murder of the Prince at Tewkesbury. In *Henry VI* Richard is the demon of revenge against the House of Lancaster. His monologue beside Henry's corpse is usually taken as a summary expression of his character—but it is no character programme—nor is, 'I am myself alone', the core of his life's philosophy. Does a man of sound mind and reasonable consideration pronounce such conceited words, and make them the principle of his life? It is an example of the poet's exaggeration and contrariness to nature: he is in no wise worthy of the blind admiration so freely heaped upon him. One must never take the sudden words of one of his characters and judge them independently of the whole character, of the moment, the mood, which gave them birth. As Richard stands by Henry's bier, bloody deeds behind him, bloodier before, it is in a kind of self-stupefying triumph that he exclaims, 'I am myself alone'. No word could interpret more forcibly not what he is and might become, but what at the moment was passing through his mind. One cannot judge of a sea in storm, and there are certain moods of soul and passion that can only express themselves in hyperbole. Compare the words of Coriolanus, with his wife and child before him, 'stand—as if a man were author of himself...'

In annihilating the Lancastrians Richard fulfilled his oath on the death of his father, and now he becomes the demon of his own house—not of revenge, but lust of power. So far we have discovered no hostile feeling against his own belongings. His character is a series of psychological problems, and this is the first. To understand him we must study his character in *Henry VI*, as well as in the play under his name. The outline of his character is in the Chronicles, where he appears as a mixture of great capacity and wild self-seeking—passionate, pursuing power above all, prodigal rather than close-fisted—in exterior humble, at heart the reverse—kissing when he plots to kill—a keen intellect—warlike-minded from natural inclination—not only a hero, but a war leader. Of mis-shapen appearance he contrasts with the handsome Yorkists. There was no shade of hypocrisy in his earlier support of his brother: why did he become the destroying angel of his house? There is a gap in his characterization before Shakespeare handled it: we hear of his defection but not of its motive. Edward IV, against the interest of his house, the dignity of the Crown, and simple loyalty to his own word, had married the widow Grey and dealt falsely with Warwick. Richard III at first looks on quietly, then breaks out in disgust—and this is the key to our understanding of his change of front. Edward does not deserve the throne, but the lust of dominion has taken hold of Richard and he had inherited love of power from his father. Besides, certain streams of time induce certain tendencies, and the Yorks through several generations had desired to rule and sought a crown. All these tendencies reached such a climax of passion and

capability in Richard III that he becomes abnormal. He appears an exception to his race, but he is really its genius. Passion for power is his concentrated individuality, and from it other traits develop. Between him and his goal stand external hindrances and inner counterbalance of feeling and conscience. His lust of power overcomes his very self, but it is wrong to interpret him as a man of no natural feelings. He wills not to have them, to be rid of them as hindrances—he is not naturally deaf to their call.

When he attains the throne his self-repression slackens, the other passion begins to lose its power, and his fall is as rapid as his rise. He allies himself with the House of York to make matters more secure, yet speaks of his kingdom as standing 'on brittle glass'. The way is less sure than he thought, and that he should admit this for the first time betrays the foundation of his character to be unsteady. If it shakes ever so little he is lost. Shakespeare's picture of him is now admirable—the opposite of the Richard of irresistible power. Inner failure prepares external downfall. In the scene with Queen Elizabeth it is he who is deceived—as he does not suspect Stanley of treachery. His eye grows less keen, and his failure to gauge opponents is the sign of the beginning of inner trouble. . . .

The critic appeals from psychology to history, and if his conclusions are true, he has done something to humanize the character of Richard. He makes us feel the force of historical tradition that drove him onward—and then left him, a mere individual, in a world of enemies. The objection is that he does not distinguish between the early and mature Shakespeare—that he approaches the play convinced that the words and deeds of Richard are rooted as deeply in human nature as those of the heroes of the later tragedies. His arguments are not far-fetched, but he leans unduly for support upon history. Because Richard was an historical personage, it makes it easier for him to justify his actions by the law of human nature, and to find movements of the heart to correspond with the stages of rise, climax, and fall that are inevitable to any earthly career. At the present day we incline to think the play Marlovian rather Shakespearian, interesting by its situations and rapidly succeeding events rather than its psychology, but humanized at points by Shakespeare's revising pen—such as these words spoken by Hastings (III. ii):

My lord, I hold my life as dear as yours;  
And never in my days, I do protest,  
Was it so precious to me as 'tis now.

THE same play is dealt with by Wilhelm Oechelhäuser,<sup>1</sup> who calls it an important boundary-stone between Shakespeare's youthful and later

<sup>1</sup> 'Richard III' (*Fahrbuch*, 1868).

brilliant period. There are signs of youth in the overflowing of the subject-matter and ideas that err against the laws of dramatic truth and beauty, and exceed the bounds set by the later riper poet. The form and content are not united, as in a masterpiece—details intrude too forcibly—motives are not sufficiently indicated—there is exaggeration, excess of feeling, and over-emphasis on the chief character. Yet defects in details are fully compensated by freshness, power, and originality.

Shakespeare is usually able to keep a just mean between the Scylla of colloquial history and the Charybdis of over-free dramatic invention. Above all, he possessed the gift of detecting, in the kaleidoscope passage of historical appearances, the eternal laws which determine, century by century, the final goal of human development. Critics have said that he knew nothing of the character of nations and different periods, that he only gives an imperfect picture of the feudal State. This may be partly true of his Roman history, but not of his English. He had no wish to write from any special political point of view, and the significance of the Wars of the Roses had not had time to make itself understood. He describes the fate of princes and people from the higher, humanistic standpoint; his leading point of view is not the principle of legitimacy, but of humanity and reverence. Richmond's closing speech celebrates not the victory of the former, but the restoration of peace and justice. No poet has stood above party politics with higher, purer integrity.

Nor is it true that he is hostile to citizens and the middle class. The commoners were always sycophants to the new usurper, and did nothing to end the wars or raise their own position. Besides, drama deals with active factors, not passive and suffering; therefore in English historical plays only kings and barons appear in the foreground.

In the second and third parts of *Henry VI* we find the ground principles of Richard's character freely set forth, independent of any historical confirmation. If egoism is latent it does not yet appear; he is more cunning and less hasty than his brother Clarence, and understands that the York dynasty must be first established before he can make a move for himself. Edward forfeits the respect of his brothers by his frivolity, and after the wooing of Lady Grey comes the monologue where Richard first reveals his inner being. His ambition is not developed by occasion, like Macbeth's; he has prepared a philosophical system that seems to justify and make natural his aspiration to the throne. Acute bitterness from deformity is his fundamental trait. Love being denied him, he vindicates search for happiness in the only other way which attracts him and he is able to pursue with success. It is interesting to note Shakespeare's deviations from history which prove how clearly and decidedly he kept the development of Richard's character in view. Unlike Holinshed he makes Richard support



Montgomery in persuading returned Edward to unfold the royal banner. At Barnet and Tewkesbury he takes a brilliant part in battle, and always leads the van. To Edward Shakespeare gives the larger part in the murder of the young Prince, because it is his rule to work up to a climax gradually. This first crime is lessened, so that the following series, King, brother, &c., may step by step stand out in stronger relief. In his second monologue, after the murder of the King, he expands his casuistic philosophy and blames for his deeds the heaven that has made him mis-shapen. He now calls by their right name the crimes which he has previously justified by self-vindication. He gives his nephew the Judas kiss with hypocritical words of affection. The art of lying and hypocrisy is here first actually displayed: so we have the developed picture of Richard III before the play of his name.

The wooing of Anne does not affect the action of the play, but merely reveals Richard's character—the master craft of his dissimulation. At first it appears as if Shakespeare had overstepped aesthetic and moral boundaries—but we must consider the circumstances. The marriage is a fact of history, and it took place at a time when all political and social bonds were loosed, in an atmosphere of executions and murders of the nearest kin. Shakespeare's audience, little removed in time, would look with other eyes than ours. We must also put away our knowledge of Richard, and see him as he appeared to the world and to Anne. Except his mother, no one suspected his aim for the throne; he was known as a cruel, intrepid, roughly frank champion of the Yorks, incapable of dissimulation. Shakespeare also knew that women especially, at a moment of extreme emotion, are more easily turned from one channel of feeling to another. It was the improbability of Richard's wooing that made it successful: had he gone to her room and wooed in the ordinary style he would have been deservedly rejected. As it is she is overcome, and her excited mood of sorrow is favourable to sudden and violent impressions. Richard understands the character and weaknesses of women, and first behaves in a rough, determined, threatening manner to the bearers. This will impress her by contrast with the gentle, humble words to herself that follow. But what wins her in the end is not only the effect of his words and admiration of her beauty, but the whole situation, entrancingly confusing to heart and mind. The sorrowing widow of the last scion of an exterminated house, with endless prospect of grief and abject conditions, sees at her feet the man she thought her deadly enemy—the powerful, dreaded Prince of a conquering house—the man who had never knelt to women, kneeling—who had never wept, weeping. She had no reason to think that he was dissimulating or had ulterior motives. The transaction, therefore, was psychologically possible.

In a series of longer or shorter dialogues of incredible Shakespearian

mastery we see how Richard uses Buckingham as long as he needs him. It is characteristic of lower natures to hate those to whom they owe their fortune, and wish to rid themselves of the burden of moral obligation. His behaviour to Buckingham is also a consequence of the fateful transformation of his character after he mounts the throne. His fall is not caused by external chances, but inner disintegration<sup>1</sup>—the madness of those whom the gods wish to destroy. Buckingham hesitates to murder the Princes, and then reminds Richard of his promises, foolishly thinking that he can pause when he likes on the downward slope of crime, and quietly enjoy the fruits of previous crimes. It is not, however, Richard's murderous intention but his broken promises that induce him to forsake Richard—and this low motive justifies his punishment. The wretched accomplice perishes on the scaffold, while the gifted villain—though not without martyrdom of conscience—dies honourably in battle.

Buckingham is a less accomplished hypocrite than Richard, and has no positive success. He has to report the cheers of a minority which he has himself provided. The English populace keep a stubborn silence, and are not turned this way and that, like the Roman plebs, by every fresh speech of a demagogue. Richard, not well pleased, takes the matter in hand himself, and then follows the crowning example of human dissimulation—the scene in Baynard's Castle. We thus have a full picture of Richard and his dissimulation, in all its shades, and in all its relations.

Nemesis begins to work after the murder of the Princes. When Buckingham hesitates, for the first time Richard loses self-control. His break with Buckingham is the signal for retreating fortune, as alliance with him was the signal for steady advance. The second wooing scene only resembles the first in the acuteness with which Richard notes the weaker side of either woman. His hypocritical love for the daughter takes a serious, dignified aspect: the King is felt behind the lover. Queen Elizabeth does not give in till he adds a threat to his former arguments—threat of death and devastation only to be avoided by this marriage. It reminds her that he is master of her life and her children's lives, and she lets prudence control her enraged feelings. Her subsequent speech is uncertain, and may be explained that she goes off with serious intent to woo her daughter for Richard. But the truth is (though not shared by other critics) that Richard has been completely defeated. Shakespeare would not have closed this important scene on an undecided note; and all that we know of Elizabeth's general character corroborates this view. She pretends to yield after Richard's final attack, ceases to speak as before, maintains a reserved attitude, and giving non-committal short answers, such as, 'Shall I be tempted of the devil?' &c. She chooses the question form

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Fischer.

from precaution, and in the next scene she is writing to Richmond, the deadly enemy of Richard, offering him her daughter's hand. It is likelier that no change took place in Elizabeth during the wooing scene than that she yielded to Richard and immediately after changed her mind. The moral triumph would not serve any purpose in the development of the plot—and the violation of motherly love and of Elizabeth's pure and high character, as so far represented in all the changing situations of life, would remain the one disfiguring blot in the scene.

*Richard III* may be Shakespeare's architectonic masterpiece. From the time that Richard mounts the throne, and more especially after the murder of the Princes, he becomes the prey of conscience. His earlier assurance vanishes; he gives and revokes orders in a breath; and the mistrust that he shows to his followers is the best way to estrange them. Worse still, he begins to spy even on the morning of the battle. Only when immediately facing danger does his former spirit resume power. His death in battle has been called violation of poetic justice; but in truth nowhere has Shakespeare brought severer punishment on a villain: not only in torments of conscience, but in the total ruin of his brilliant hopes. He thought to the end to make use of men as submissive tools of his will. Accustomed to crime from childhood he believed his conscience would for ever remain silent. That he should confess that no one loves him or will mourn for him is proof of inner torture. His tone at the end differs from the proud beginning—'I am myself alone'. Shakespeare's dramatic instinct avoided bringing him and Richmond, his contrast, on the stage together, except in the speechless whirl of battle. A dialogue between them would have surpassed powers of speech and art of representation. There would have been risk of overcharged pathos and conventional stage-combat, turning to ridicule the grand effect of the close. . . .

This is sound criticism, the result of careful and detailed study of the text side by side with history. In historical plays it is plausible that outer events should play a greater part in determining inner moods, so that the tendency of German criticism to emphasize the outer event is less to be blamed. What the critic's mind contributes is an historical and psychological scaffolding which acts like a support to the reality of the play. He tells us his views on Buckingham and Queen Elizabeth, and points to the reactions of their deeds on history. We must either accept or reject definitely; our minds cannot make innumerable returns upon themselves as with the problems of *Hamlet*. But the merit of Oechelhäuser is that, having found a congenial theme, he has so far unified art and fact that if his criticism fails to be imaginative it only just fails. We become aware that the enchanted land exists, that the boundary-fence is low, and we can cross at will. This is most apparent in his description of the wooing of Lady Anne.

## VI

HEINRICH VIEHOFF<sup>1</sup> does not agree that *Coriolanus* is one of a tetralogy giving the political history of the Roman people. It is an independent, rounded-off work, the central idea of which is not the political struggle between plebeians and patricians, but the character of an important person, and the fate rooted in this character. Otherwise different motives should have been assigned for the hero's fall, and the whole play differently organized. Shakespeare's chief concern was the character and individual fate of Coriolanus. His worth and greatness, and his passion and guilt, had their roots in simple and natural relations and struggles, independent of any advancing changes in State conditions. The ground principle of his character is not actually pride, nor ambition, but noble love of glory, or rather, longing for great deeds arising from his heroic temper and invincible power, such as belongs to the heroic age of all nations. This lofty, heroic soul is softened and beautified by noble humanity—the oldest inborn quality in man—reverence for family—in him not only in its narrow sense, but in devotion to his class.

As these are his chief moral traits, Shakespeare was bound to make guilt and atonement the result. His heroism and love of class lead him into intemperance, and the bonds of family reverence break his passion and determine him to dedicate himself knowingly to destruction. Had pride or ambition or immeasurable love of power been his ruling passion, how is it that he has such a horror of public applause, willingly serves under Cominius, and says to his mother, 'I had rather be their servant in my way' (II. i)? But his pride of race and patrician haughtiness are unmistakable, and he is often reproached with them. Patrician, not ordinary, pride is at bottom natural and wholesome, born of a heroic nature and family reverence.

Not without intention Shakespeare represents the plebs as cowardly, vacillating, short-sighted, and grumbling at the privileges of the patricians, whose qualities they lacked. Coriolanus is naturally enraged at these claims of the incompetent; and Shakespeare thus represents him to explain his tragic guilt, not because he himself sympathized with his hero's aristocratic notions. He had to show how deeply he was imbued with patrician views to make it comprehensible that, with a nature so noble throughout, he was led to a deep crime against his fatherland. He opposed the plebs less as a personal matter than in the cause of his class. If at last he turned against his whole country, including the patricians, it was the necessary consequence of his political conviction—that patricians alone were called to govern, and a state governed by the people was a political abortion.

Shakespeare also represents Coriolanus's specific consciousness of

<sup>1</sup> 'Coriolanus' (*Fahrbuch*, 1869).

Roman citizenship overgrown and shadowed by his heroic nature. The heroic spirit is associated with a certain cosmopolitan element; heroes of antiquity did not yearn after home, but sought an arena for their courage. Coriolanus, like one of these heroes of old, would consider a worthy adversary to be a rival in glory, and only secondarily an enemy of his country. His spirit, courage, rage, outbursts of feeling are gigantic. Shakespeare has wonderfully aroused our admiration and pity for the misguided man, despite his great crime, by displaying in his character the qualities that explain his revolt from Rome. And to give loftiness to the tragic effect of his downfall he crowns him with noble virtues—he is upright, hates deceit, is faithful to friends and grateful to benefactors.

Menenius Agrippa is a foil to the hero and a useful accessory figure, yet completely individual. Thoroughly patrician in outlook, he is a man with a heart for the people, and their sincere well-wisher. On one hand, his admiration of Coriolanus serves as a mirror in which we see a picture of the latter reflected, though at times exaggerated. On the other, his comic colouring serves to lessen the tension that predominates throughout, and to soften artistically the serious ground tone of the play.

Aufidius, the driving-wheel of much of the action, also promotes the estimation of Coriolanus's high character. He is the pride of the Volscians, as Coriolanus of the Romans, and each is the most dreaded enemy of the other's country. Aufidius is akin to Coriolanus in heroic spirit and power, yet his inferior. The contrast of character is calculated to secure the supreme interest for Coriolanus. The latter remains true to the death to the qualities of heroic minds—straight-forwardness, candour, uprightness; but the originally noble nature of Aufidius suffers a bad metamorphosis. His rage that he cannot equal Coriolanus poisons his being, and his whole subsequent conduct must be judged from this point of view. He pretends not to recognize Coriolanus until the latter unmuffles, that he may force his hated enemy to explain further, and decide meanwhile how to deal with him. His final answer, 'Each word thou hast spoke . . .', is not genuine; its very superabundance—as described by the three servants—points to hypocrisy. Only when his enemy lies dead we may believe that his envious rage is over and his grief is true. . . .

It is true that the greatest thing in Coriolanus is the hero's character, but it is not equally clear—as Viehoff would have us believe—that the political philosophy was Shakespeare's own. Shakespeare was interested above all in human character, and secondarily in political theory; it is likely that, under the creative spell, he let his mind follow its congenial path. The critic errs in substituting conscious for unconscious design, yet he records his impressions honestly, and—though we think he has misinterpreted them—they witness unknowingly

to the full Shakespearian force. The core of his criticism is that Shakespeare has made us admire Coriolanus, despite his crime, by displaying the qualities that cause his revolt. It reminds us of those critics who insist rightly that we sympathize with Macbeth, although he was a murderer. The explanation is that when a human heart is entirely laid open we can wonder, but we cannot judge. The heart of man is infinite, and those actions which proceed from its lowest depths cannot be praised or blamed according to earthly laws. It must be admitted that Coriolanus is a lesser character than Macbeth, because, in the words of an earlier critic, he is inhuman; but it is to the credit of Viehoff that he has experienced so far.

On the other hand, his censure of Aufidius is certainly to be deprecated. It is another instance of German failure to judge Shakespeare first of all as a poet, and interpret him by the inner spirit of his verse. The rhythm of these lines, in the speech to which he alludes, where the attentive reader can even catch the accents of the speaker's voice, disproves the charge of hypocrisy:

I loved the maid I married ; never man  
Sighed truer breath ; but that I see thee here,  
Thou noble thing ! more dances my rapt heart  
Than when I first my wedded mistress saw  
Bestride my threshold.

Viehoff holds the same view about *J.C.*,<sup>1</sup> that it is an independent study of character, not one of an historical series. That from Plutarch's description Shakespeare should give us such a Brutus proves his high poetic power. He is a noble idea of manhood, full of self-conscious power, and of love, a hero of the ancient Roman type, adorned with humanity of a highly cultured period, rich in feeling and spirit, but simple and homely in appearance, sparing of words when greatly moved, not less possessed of virtues acquired by stern training of spirit and will, than of those innate in him, of quick warm feeling, yet capable of cool determination, contemplative, and of strong action when required, above mean passions, but of passionate enthusiasm for right and dignity of man, a stoic according to natural inclination and philosophical creed, able to suffer as to act, not wooer of popular favour, yet, from some obscure feeling of his grandeur stared at and honoured by the populace, steering straight towards the pole of justice amidst the conflicting streams of party passions, clean of heart and mind in a degenerate, conscienceless world.

That the chief interest should attach to Brutus Shakespeare had to belittle Caesar: although Plutarch did suggest that shortly before his death Caesar's character changed for the worse. Shakespeare reveals him fearful and superstitious, and also arrogant—so that Brutus's

<sup>1</sup> *Jahrbuch*, 1870.

fears of his future deterioration are justified. The whole figure is designed with regard to Brutus. When his ghost appears it is symbolic of the then condition of mind of Brutus, his despair of success, and grief for the useless sacrifice of his friend.

Shakespeare has also to guard against describing the energy and activity of Cassius and Antony in such a manner as to place Brutus's quiet and measured ways in shadow. In Cassius he displays similar traits of character to Brutus, in Antony contrasting traits. Similarity and contrast are two artistic ways of showing up character. Cassius shares with Brutus the ancient Roman spirit with the culture of a later age, the love of freedom and hatred of monarchy. Both set the honour of the free man above life—both are dignified, serious, and thoughtful, brave, ready to devote themselves to high objects—both prove faithful friends and trustworthy allies to one another. Yet they are still sharply distinguished from each other. Cassius has more political acumen, more statesmanlike insight. Plutarch writes that Brutus hated tyranny, not the tyrant; but with Cassius hatred of the tyrant overbalanced that of the monarchy. Brutus struggles between personal affection for Caesar and fundamental dislike of monarchical power; whereas envy inflames Cassius's hate for the tyranny. In contrast to Brutus he has a hasty choleric temper. Brutus desires only noble means to noble purpose, Cassius is willing to use low means as tools. Brutus desires his fellow-conspirators to bring to the matter the same purity and blamelessness which he exacts from himself; Cassius disregards their faults. On all sides Brutus's character rises superior, so that at times of crisis Cassius gives in to his moral superiority, and this adds to the imposing effect of the picture.

Antony is a complete contrast to Brutus—voluptuary, gambler, courtier, time-server, cunning, hypocritical, eloquent popular speaker, appealing to the lowest desires of the people whom he uses for his own selfish aims. An ambitious man, he finds no means too bad for his end, and to secure power and means of pleasure he outlaws and murders. He is so little faithful to his own party that he uses his cotriumvir as a messenger and beast of burden. He moves the populace in his favour by reading Caesar's will, and then proposes to cut out some of its legacies. Yet he has brilliant qualities, such as energetic will power and practical superiority. He was no doubt genuinely attached to Caesar, as we see from his monologue in presence of the dead body. His relation to Brutus is that of a master of deception with the most unsuspecting loyal spirit. His speech to the people is filled with well thought-out effect. He is at his best in the last act, in his behaviour to Lucilius and praise of Brutus.

Casca—like Brutus—appears at first with a kind of veil over his character. He wears a mask of indifference, and ready humour quite in Shakespeare's style. Brutus misunderstands him while Cassius sees

through him, but it requires the tumult of the storm to bring his true nature to light.

Brutus does not die with a sense of guilt, but remains conscious to death of having acted from the noblest motives. He knew, indeed, that the whole unhappy harvest had sprung from the seed sown on the Ides of March—and this is the meaning of his exclamation over the dead Cassius, 'O Julius Caesar, thou art mighty yet',—but there is no self-accusation. Otherwise he would not have died nobly facing Antony.

Some critics have called the fall of Brutus poetic justice, but in tragedy the guiltless also are borne down. It is useless to seek in the downfall of a tragic hero for a corresponding crime. Tragedy does not appeal to our sense of justice, but to a feeling of absolute moral independence, to an inner power that victoriously defies fate and even death, which leaves a man inwardly triumphant though he fail outwardly. It is the highest form of art because it deals thus with the noblest in man. Tragic heroes act as they do because the nobility of their nature forbids them to act otherwise. From action of this kind it is impossible that guilt should arise; their innocence is their guilt, and their fall no penance but a glorification. Brutus is such a tragic figure, and the faults that he has are errors and failures that spring from and illuminate his nobility. If they must be stamped as faults, their guilt—in the words of Hegel—is at the same time their honour. . . .

Where Viehoff fails is in his scale of poetic values. He judges Brutus and Cassius and the Antony of *J.C.* as though they were quite first-rate Shakespearian characters: he would compare the sayings of Brutus on ambition with those of Macbeth. He does not distinguish between philosophic truth and poetic truth: he ignores the oft-quoted phrase of Longinus that 'beautiful words are the light of thought'. Yet the characters live again in his imagination, and he watches their moral natures contract or expand according to the events of the play. He also compels attention by his estimate of the tragic character. It is a tribute, partly unconscious, to the fact that Shakespeare saw to the end of human nature. A storm may wreck half a town, but we do not call it immoral; and so we do not condemn Othello, and we even hesitate to condemn Macbeth, because the mind of each appears infinite, like the universe. Ruskin once quoted Byron's saying that there is no tenderness like Dante's, because Dante reached the heart of every subject that he treated—and there is something in the heart of a thing that we shall neither mock at nor judge. Of lesser matters we may note Viehoff's saying that Shakespeare used similarity as well as contrast to reveal character, and it helps us to realize Brutus and Cassius more clearly as individuals. Also his remark that Caesar's superstitions justified Brutus's apprehensions is the best apology for what has been considered the weakest spot in the character of Brutus.



## VII

H. A. WERNER<sup>1</sup> blames his own over-subjective age for explaining the problem of Hamlet subjectively, and concentrating solely on the hero. A hero does not condition his world and surroundings; he may influence his age, but equally feels its influence. Shakespeare with correct knowledge of nature sees and describes the connexion and mutual influence of the masses and the individual; but the critic stands before the central figure, exhausts himself with opinions and suppositions, and finds so much to say and prove that, lost amid detail, he forgets the whole—and so the obscurity grows, by no fault of the poet.

The purpose here is not to dispel this obscurity, but to remember how it stands in close harmony with the subject and lesser essentials of the play—and then to seek its cause and draw its limits. The chief ground for the play's attraction as well as its obscurity is that it treats in a wholly objective manner a world-historical question of all society, especially modern and Christian. The first difficulty for the understanding is in the greatness and nature of the subject; the second, the method of handling. Finally, it is likely that Shakespeare himself could not give the solution to his problem, and that his object was not solution out of personal consideration for his public.

The play is not heroic tragedy—since its hero lacks heroic qualities, but is rather an interesting epic or lyric figure. Hamlet differs from Othello and Macbeth, but does in a measure correspond with Lear. Both plays have a chief character but no hero: they arouse pity, not admiration. What is lofty and overpowering is the passivity of Hamlet and Lear amid certain forces which appear incorporated in secondary characters, but really charge the atmosphere of the plays, so that individual persons seem only their tools. The moral-pathological interest that tragedy may require is also present in the whole atmosphere and not in any single person. If elsewhere tragedy deals with the soul-malady of the individual, here we get the wild disturbance in the moral condition of society. Suddenly, or gradually, it surrounds the hero, ensnares and poisons him, and, though his own guilt may be slight, drags him into the abyss, while it heaps round and over him, like a grave-mound, the ruins and bones of a whole guilty world. In this *Hamlet* and *Lear* contrast with ancient tragedy: tragic pathos is centred in the whole community, and takes the form of a destroying power working with the necessity of a natural law, but less crime than moral disease.

Lear and Hamlet are guiltless and suffering, or at least unequal to their tasks. They are under the ban of broken moral laws, though not themselves breakers. Though sentence is not passed upon them, they

<sup>1</sup> 'On the Obscurity in the Hamlet Tragedy' (*Fahrbuch*, 1870).

succumb under God's judgement over the whole of society. The mainspring of the action in *Lear* is the corruption of family life, as in *Hamlet* it is the corruption of social life. Our whole life and being exists between State and family, and where both are diseased the individual is doomed to primeval chaos. Such was the task that the poet set himself as herald of a new world epoch—a tragedy of awakening mass-consciousness, popular conscience, sovereignty of society over individual will. With the new law still struggling for recognition it would still remain vague, and the poet's words sound obscure. The play affects us like an oracle which can only be understood when its words are fulfilled.

From the beginning everything in the *Hamlet*-world is shadowy and unsubstantial. The mainspring of the action is a phantom—yet only this phantom, among the persons of the play, stands on the firm ground of justice and morality. His is the only Will inviolably ruled by the eternal law; but in him, since incorporeal will is prevented from actively exercising its power, that which is real appears above all as inactive thought. In this way he is the type and antitype of all other figures brought before us.

When Hamlet says that 'conscience makes cowards', he is not accusing himself but the world around him. He sees the effects, not the cause—which is that only bad conscience prevents achievement. Thought does not kill great decisions, but one-sided thought, weak brooding, and cold reckoning. Perversion of all relations must have preceded Hamlet's mistaken judgement. The world must indeed be out of joint when it has become possible to curse the powers and ordinances that still hold it together. Hamlet's world is so corrupt that it holds together in appearance only. This applies not only to the State, but to the society on which it rests. The family of Polonius represents the latter, the rule of the King the former. That a murderer and breaker of natural laws should rule shows the condition of the times.

Hamlet mocks Polonius because he dislikes him instinctively and feels for him insuperable moral antagonism. The morality in Polonius's family is not inward and sincere, but only what is prescribed by others. The ideal is respectability, and the mutual exhortations are inspired by no fear of God, or self-discipline. In the cause of respectability Ophelia unresistingly withdraws from Hamlet. Laertes has father and sister to revenge, and has studied the laws of honour in Paris, but lets himself be persuaded into treachery. Calculations and reckoning overpower the strongest natural instincts. No wonder the criminal King is outwardly gracious to his wronged nephew, and the Queen, who is at least conscious of her guilty marriage, attempts to point the way of right to him by reproach and exhortation. This corruption is neither wholly recognized nor wholly hidden from any one of the actors; they do not trust each other, since no one trusts

himself. Polonius not only exhorted his son but sent a spy after him: he could forgive much, but nothing that would dishonour him in polite society.

Another symptom of superficial society is the lack of loftier feelings—love, loyalty, uprightness. However loudly Ophelia's love may have spoken to her heart, it becomes childish trifling. In such a world it cannot attain to deep, true passion, or give happiness to a martyred, lonely Hamlet thirsting for truth. Had the mother once belonged wholly to Hamlet's father or not? Had she married Claudius for passion or some other reason? Does she cling to him undividedly, or is her heart more given to her unhappy son? Nothing could be more deplorable than her position, but she is as incapable as Ophelia of any great enduring feeling, sees herself painfully torn first one way, then another, and lies all round. Polonius desires to please every one, and is double-tongued on the slightest provocation. How distinguish between pretence and reality in such a world? Shakespeare gives us credit for an instinct of truth, without entering into all the causes: herein lies the chief difficulty in understanding the play.

Hamlet is the only one to seek for truth and justice in a world of lies. This is his tragic significance, for such a knot cannot be unloosed by the wisdom of a single individual—only by that power we call the law of the moral world, of which the individual is merely a tool. But if we are shown the truth it is not the whole truth—only the ugly side of humanity. Because we miss the reverse side we find so much to discuss. Hamlet stands on the boundary of boy and man—an age fitted for great enterprises, and in the lives of heroes and statesmen the creative one. Exceptionally noble by nature, called as few are to rule, and already penetrated by searching ideas, his mind is directed to the highest in all that concerns humanity. Even his brooding melancholy betrays his sense of the failure of the earthly to attain the ideal. His mind is philosophically developed, but without pride; knowing the limits of all human knowledge; but philosophy has steeled him against ghosts and fear of death. He is an exceptionally great man, but succumbs to the small ones around.

There are two ways to fight wickedness—either to use like weapons of cunning, or meet knavery with strength, treachery with loyalty. Hamlet has the means in himself for either method, but unfortunately he mingled the two. He has so profound a sense of justice, honour, and truth that he attacks Laertes for using what he considers hypocritical phrases. He loathes the royal graciousness, Polonius's wisdom, his mother's exhortations. Yet he feigns madness the better to achieve his end, and wastes time and power and opportunity. This leads to the reproach that he is half-hearted, unmanly, pathological—but nothing could be falsier or more contrary to the essence of the play. The indecision is his tragic fate which he can as little escape as Oedipus; but

Shakespeare wishes to prove the power of society over the individual. Hamlet, though in a lesser degree, is ruined along the same lines, divided and torn in two, as all else of his time. When the Ghost reveals to him the murder, like all noble natures, he turns on himself and questions whether it is an evil phantom. His better side seduces him from action to investigation—from which there is no exit. When there is an inner tumult and spiritual struggle only those succeed who have attained to a clear moral outlook. Deeper natures mistrust themselves more after failure. Hamlet's struggle becomes more and more inward, and while striving outwardly for certainty and stability for the moral deed he loses himself in abstract loftiness, in a lonely world of thought, whence only chance at last brings him down to the actual world and execution of justice.

Over-profound, he wavers between two ages of the world, and two ways of thinking. He maligns the conscience that holds him back from lawless deeds, but cannot drive him to unaccustomed deeds at the call of duty and sacred necessity. Had he belonged in thought and will to the world about him he would have faced and annihilated Claudius; but the idealistic part of him must first be assured of inner justification. Not conscience but uncertainty about himself and matters of fact makes the bold man a coward, in spite of natural fitness. That those around him should prevent his return to Wittenburg proves that they discouraged the study of new ideas. It is his highest duty to unmask and exterminate this miserable state of things. As citizen, son, and future monarch he is called not only to common revenge, but to hold judgement and set up the State on right foundations. Why does not he, who possesses the qualities of statesman, hero, and king, assemble the people (who rise immediately to the call of Laertes), tell them the truth, and demand their help?

He certainly lacks the qualities for practical activity and worldly success. He has no ambition or love of power, and his pride lifts him above everything that is small and mean. He retains only the godlike, nothing of the demonic which he sees in the world around. Evil and commonness have had no power over him except to make him hate them. There remains for him only to act according to the highest, purest impulses: but here the enervating influence of a bad world is felt. He can reject, but cannot oppose anything new and whole to what he rejects. Everything around is unstable, with no guiding aim or principle. The most gifted are the most lacking in steady moral will—and in this he resembles them. He therefore withdraws entirely within himself, and with astounding versatility gives himself up to a hundred things. Love makes him a poet; he is a master of music and the drama; he can be a wily statesman and a diplomat. A dreamer in the churchyard, he is next seen as a master of fence. He enters into everything with zeal, and thereby helps himself to forget his great task.

His thoughts are equally multifarious: he does not trust the Ghost but craves more proof. The veil of society has planted such deep mistrust in his soul that it grows there like a weed, and clings even to things beyond all doubt. The idealist takes all appearance at first as truth, and strives to make it his own; but no single person can fathom everything at once. In the immoderate struggle he becomes incapable of concentrating on a single goal.

In Hamlet Shakespeare wishes to show how this demoralized age can undermine the personal conscience, with its understanding of most sacred duties, as also the worth and fitness of an individual. We see how noble impulse gives place to brilliant accomplishments and intellectual triflings. The best is drawn into the system of superficiality, and strength is exerted which leads nowhere. In such a world the idealist stands betrayed and neglected, but if he is noble and pure, like Hamlet, he has the consolation in his overthrow of dragging down with him the whole base world, to make room for a better. If the overthrow itself is the necessary consequence of his own relationship with the universal degeneracy, then we see Hamlet's connexion with his surroundings. If we thus enter into the poet's meaning and purpose all difficulty vanishes. If Hamlet is a heterogeneous figure amid his surroundings, there is still no need to condemn him. To do so is to misunderstand the form of moral disease which Shakespeare wishes to represent.

The play is a questioning of fate—the first half of a Job poem, a serious, solemn contrast between good and bad in the world, from which there is no victorious issue—a riddle without an answer. Shakespeare paints a dark, incomprehensible side of human existence, a mysterious night-piece, into which he pours all that is gloomy in his otherwise clear soul—and so chooses for background the darker northern sky, the lonely sea, the willow-grown brook, the sandy grave. He calls to life the spirits of the dead, and lets madness—real and feigned—wander across the stage. In this world the highest and holiest is insecure, and questions after God and righteousness are unheard. There is gathered together everything dark and barren to chill body and soul—with no dawn this side of the grave. . . .

Like all theorists, Werner takes us a certain distance and no more. He makes a good start in depicting outer conditions, but when he reaches the infinite mystery of the individual soul, we feel that his theory is no better or worse than a hundred others. We prefer an agnostic attitude, as with the phenomena of psychical research of which we do not know the laws, but must be content to record and classify our adventures in the hope of a future day of explanation. These messages may be from our lost friends, but they may also be telepathy between the living: and for the present we had better seek an answer to the question, What is telepathy? Even so, the best kind

of Hamlet-criticism is a kind of telepathy between the living. He was a human being—truer than a real person, as Carlyle said of Shakespeare's characters—and we are also human beings. Let us record faithfully our impressions from his super-mind and compare them among ourselves, and, perhaps, in the future his place in the moral universe will be ascertained. But to impose from without theories and ready-made wisdom will not advance the matter. Professor Bradley once said that if a poet already knew exactly what he meant to say he would not write the poem—that only its completion reveals to him what he wanted.<sup>1</sup> The Hamlet that we have is a kind of after-thought of Shakespeare's mind, retraced from crude beginnings. He started with no fixed purpose, and whether he reached the goal at which he aimed as yet we do not know. The defect of Werner and others is to accumulate abstractions, and then affirm that, given these qualities and circumstances, he could not have acted otherwise—and by doing so minimize the incalculable force of his personality.

To prove his theory Werner makes various far-fetched statements—e.g. that because they are hostile to new ideas the King and Queen prevent Hamlet's return to Wittenberg; and that the simultaneous overthrow of Hamlet and his world is the connexion between them. However, his treatise has the merit of making clearer the exact nature of the corruption of Hamlet's world: the 'respectability' of Polonius and his family, in the cause of which Ophelia renounced Hamlet—the King's courtesy—the characters of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, and Osric, &c. Of Hamlet's world he is a skilled interpreter, but his skill fails—we think—when he treats the reactions of Hamlet to his world, and the depths of Hamlet's soul.

### VIII

SOME remarks of Oechelhäuser this year (1870) about the characters of Hamlet, Macbeth, and Shylock are worth chronicling. The characteristics which we noted in his examination of the historical plays persist; and his criticism is that of one who, after acquainting himself with the works of other critics, has re-read the plays with a stimulated mind, and remained true to his impressions, strengthened by the reasons which he finds for disagreeing with his opponents. If his vision is not wide, it is at least clear.

Goethe's indication of the fundamental idea of *Hamlet* is for him no key to a correct view of the separate passages and characters. The charm is the mystery of the insoluble. Against others, he agrees with Ulrici that Hamlet was not of melancholy phlegmatic temperament. His ideal was shattered, his nature lost its balance, and in passionate exasperation he plunged into errors the very opposite of his high personal qualities. His wit runs into sarcasm—and self-consciousness

<sup>1</sup> *Oxford Lectures on Poetry*, p. 23.

grows to self-torture. In death his character regains its original purity, which has been overshadowed, but not lost.

Of Macbeth's character he takes the middle view: that he was physically brave but morally a coward. His second conversation with Lady Macbeth proves that long before the events with which the play begins Duncan's murder had been planned between them. Nothing but combined working of two such similar natures and strong passions could have effected this hideous deed. Macbeth's self-deception is characteristic of the moral coward; he is only persuaded at last to do that which has long lingered in his soul. The after-effects on Lady Macbeth have tempted critics to see in her the signs of a superior nature; but this is a psychological error that omits the deep difference between male and female temperament. Above all, those critics are wrong who ascribe all to her passionate love for Macbeth. Had such a powerful motive been in Shakespeare's mind he would have indicated it more clearly. No doubt they loved each other in their way, and his words on her death do not show lack of feeling. They express the utter shattering and emptiness of the inner man, absolute hopelessness. He had long made up his account with all earthly happiness, and can feel no further stroke of fate.

In depicting Shylock Shakespeare was not catering for the blind hatred of the Jew in his time. He rather shows that the persecutors were in part responsible for the abject condition of those to whom Shylock belonged. The typical miser is more emphasized than the typical Jew. Money is his life; whereas when told that he must embrace Christianity he answers: 'I am content'. He is an individual Jew, who does not represent a race which neither persecution nor lust of gold have made renounce their faith. The degenerate Jew appears in his cunning, hatred, and thirst for revenge.

## IX

WILHELM KÖNIG<sup>1</sup> thinks the underlying idea of *Hamlet* to be the glorification of nature in action, and the activity of man, by presenting a picture of the opposite. Moderation is another cardinal feature, avoidance of exaggeration—lest all veer round to the opposite. Hence results the double-sidedness of Shakespeare's nature, which sees the reverse in all things, bad in good, good in bad. There can be manifold contradictions in human nature, and Shakespeare defines them under two chief headings: blood, that is, passion and impulse—and judgement, or the intellectual powers that control passion and guide impulse. If the balance of the several powers is unsteady the organism is disturbed: hence the chief subject of the present tragedy. In *Hamlet* the intellectual predominates and the natural withdraws, which does not prevent this incongruity leading

<sup>1</sup> 'Characteristic Features in the *Hamlet* Tragedy' (*Fahrbuch*, 1871).

to violent emotions. Hamlet is an idealist and the reverse of one—gifted with understanding, feeling, and imagination, and highly cultivated—but the necessary harmony is lacking: the will and energy are inferior to the other powers. He offers, therefore, the picture of an ill-balanced, morbid organism, and only this conception of him can satisfactorily elucidate the whole play.

Where is the tragic guilt when a hero fails through a fault of nature? Shakespeare gives the answer—that use can almost change the stamp of nature; and also that men's virtues may take corruption from a particular fault. Hamlet seems conscious of the blot in his own nature, but though he speaks impressively to his mother, he does not find the words to apply to himself. He has given himself up to thought and study and his inclinations have become overmastering and one-sided, and injurious to his position. His duty was to prepare for the throne, although the kingdom seems to have been elective. Our sympathy would be weakened had he been the legitimate successor and mildly let himself be supplanted; but it is a pleasing trait that he puts aside his hopes and does not let them interfere with the duty imposed on him. Guilt and natural failing are so intermingled that the fault lies in that twilight in which every real tragic poet leaves the guilt of his hero. We may blame, but we must also pity, as we look into that dark prospect where responsible freedom and insurmountable barriers of nature are mysteriously knit together.

After the ghost scene he would have done well to confide in his friends, but instead he feigns madness—a proof of his inner dislocation. It is no sign of prudence or means to an end, as some commentators have suggested—for he thereby makes it impossible to win over partisans and gain the truth of the people, and he gave the King an opportunity to forestall him. The monologues in Acts III and IV most clearly reveal his character and are a key to the understanding of the play. That of Act III offers difficulties, as we see from the different extant views concerning it; of which the least plausible is that he feared the risk of death in his undertaking. Danger is never the reason that holds him back, and on occasion he rushes into it madly. The striking thing is that he meditates suicide when about to prosecute an immediate object, and when his undertaking promises success. Some question has arisen about the 'undiscovered country', seeing that the Ghost had appeared. It may be a slip—and also the Ghost is not to be identified with a return from the beyond. He certainly imparts news, but actually about his prison house he may not speak, though one may look on the horrors at which he hints as a communication. It has also been suggested that Purgatory is a place on earth—which would quite do away with the contradiction. But there seems no satisfactory solution, and the most noteworthy thing is that Hamlet in the course of his reflection does not mention



the appearance of the Ghost or speak of what it hints concerning the beyond.<sup>1</sup> The monologue of Act IV presents lesser difficulties and gives a clearer insight into Hamlet's character, though it serves no purpose in influencing the action.

Ophelia is a female Hamlet, but the difference is that she lacks his brilliant understanding and assured judgement. Shakespeare makes no effort, in face of her father, to give effect to her own inclinations, and it is by this helplessness that she is touching. No one doubts that she loves Hamlet, though she does not say so, and although he expresses his love his harshness does not seem to agree. It must be explained by the whole distraction of his being, and his simulated madness, for, knowing his character, it is impossible to doubt but that his declaration is genuine, and nothing is further from him than dallying. It was unnecessary to sacrifice his love, and we know how painful it was by Ophelia's description of his parting. It did not impede his cause, and his mother, and also Polonius, favoured the connexion. He would thus have won the help of Polonius and Laertes and perhaps others.

Hamlet's loneliness is the cause and result of his unhappy situation. Horatio, who has the qualities and balance of powers lacking to Hamlet, was a valuable friend to lean upon, but is more passive than active. As a sympathetic friend he should have encouraged Hamlet to act—though himself prevented from interfering actively by the oath of secrecy imposed on him. The same is true of Ophelia, although it was consistent with her nature not to act. Polonius is a contrast, and also Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, who over-meddle and interfere in the wrong way.

The counterpart to Hamlet is the King, who loves material pleasures above power, and commits a crime that he may freely indulge. He is without conscience and moral foundation, and he can no more than Hamlet act in an open straightforward fashion. He also has difficulties to overcome—the secrecy imposed by his crime, necessary consideration for the Queen, his relation to the Court, State, Law. It is to his advantage that Hamlet plays the madman and kills Polonius. He does not reply with rash action, but deals his blows through others and uses roundabout means, so that together with his enemy he becomes the victim of his intrigues. The Queen has an unmistakable family likeness to Hamlet, and can no more resist than Ophelia: and this explains how she yields to her seducer.

Laertes, the reverse of Hamlet, is rapid in action, and his want of consideration makes him morally unscrupulous. The key to all is Fortinbras, a figure outside the action, but bringing the others into perspective. Harmoniously organized, he acts from no selfish external considerations, but is inflamed by the thought of honour. He is not lost in the limitless, but strives after the highest according to his

<sup>1</sup> See Hartley Coleridge.

position in life. His ideal is concerned with the State, to which ideal Hamlet remains negative and strange. Hamlet's position is that of lonely, misunderstood idealist, who by culture and nobility of disposition stands above his circle, from which, nevertheless, he springs, and from which he cannot wholly tear himself free. His actual being therefore becomes a torment to him, and his surroundings detestable: hence his bitterness, harshness, and lack of feeling that extend to the whole age. He lived between the ancient period of the power of nature and the finer civilization of modern times. He did not possess his father's gigantic strength, and was behind his generation in strength, but ahead of them in cultured civilization. He abhorred the hollow super-civilization and falsity around, and with all his princely superiority still had a trait of natural simplicity that contrasted with ceremonial mockery of others. Though his ways are devious, his love of truth equally contrasts him with all who represent the State. Where all was corrupt, wholesale slaughter was justified, to make way for government represented by Fortinbras. . . .

König's criticism stands midway between literal and psychological. Convinced that it was Hamlet's duty to act he seeks in human nature the reasons for his failure to act. At times his method does light up a character—e.g. Ophelia—and he says well that in surrendering her love Hamlet delayed rather than advanced his project. Again it is true that Horatio is a passive character; but to affirm that his oath of secrecy after the Ghost's appearance precludes him from helping Hamlet is an absurdity. Hamlet's feigned madness was another self-imposed obstacle, but we now realize the cause to lie in the incidents of the old story. Between these and the character of Hamlet a gulf is for ever set, but only in quite modern times has it been recognized—and König may be compared with a pre-Darwinian writer on evolution. He feels that there are contradictions, and sets them forth clearly, but he naturally over-relates Hamlet to his circle. In penetrating into his mind he is recalled too soon to the events of the play. Of what we consider the best way of approaching the mystery of Hamlet's soul enough has been already said.

## X

KARL ELZE,<sup>1</sup> finds two main portions in *M.N.D.*—masque and anti-masque—the actual masque being the frame of the love stories. Shakespeare here raises the masque to the highest form of art: as his greatness lies in perfecting existing dramatic species. Nowhere do learned and popular poetry differ so much as in the masque of Shakespeare and Ben Jonson. Shakespeare clowns are not fauns but English tradesmen, his spirits from medieval folk-lore: and thus we see the art with which he transformed the pedantic mythology of the masques into

<sup>1</sup> *Essays on Sh.*, 1868-72 (trans. Dora Schmitz, 1874).

a popular one. The play was probably written to celebrate the marriage of Essex in 1590. It is also evident that Leicester's marriage with Essex's mother (1578) served as a suggestion and prototype for the Hamlet tragedy: we recognize Leicester as the model of Claudius, the Countess of Essex as the Queen, and Robert Essex as Hamlet.<sup>1</sup> Shakespeare here mirrors the love affairs of the aristocracy who, as a privileged caste, gave free reign to all their whims and inclinations: even the more virtuous ladies married two or three times. Intricacies of love appear as the dreams and visions of an oppressive midsummer's night: Essex's marriage is the joyful awakening and happy ending. All this explains Puck's otherwise meaningless plea for pardon. The aristocracy make of love either a frivolous amusement in idleness, or sensual caprice; but the lower classes regard it tragically, i.e. 'Pyramus'. Shakespeare makes us see that each party may learn from the other. Both views are wrong because one-sided: mutual penetration alone results in what is right.

Character, not story, interested Shakespeare, and perhaps his superior skill in drawing characters led him to remodel older plays. But for Marlowe's *Jew of Malta* Shakespeare's *Merchant* would not have been written; and Barabas contains at least the germ and suggestion of Shylock. Marlowe indulges in the dream of wealth characteristic of poets, who since Homer's days have been doomed to poverty. Shakespeare, rich in experience of inner and outer life, would not have been exempt from this poetical weakness. He may thus have felt the necessity of freeing himself poetically from all sorts of external and internal influences which entered his mind concerning wealth and prosperity. Marlowe's play and the story of the lady of Belmont could not fail to touch this chord in his soul. The latter offered a splendid contrast to the Jewish usurer and miser; and he relates the figures to one another in a wonderful and varied manner—and animates them by the most different motives that co-operate towards internal unity. By another path we reach the conclusion of Gervinus that the fundamental thought of the play is man's relation to wealth. Shylock, Antonio, Portia prove that wealth or possession is not happiness in itself. Shakespeare knows that possession leads to moral degradation and ruin if it does not serve a moral purpose. The question is not what a man has, but what he is; and the play treats of the struggle between appearance and reality. The Christians have made Shylock a usurer, and caused wealth to stifle his moral sense. He represents Judaism degraded to its lowest point by centuries of political and social bondage. He has grown up under the letter of the Mosaic religion and knows nothing higher than an eye for an eye, &c. Selfishness and bitterness have spread to his home life: he remembers his wife only by a jewel. He never dreams that Jessica has any right to enjoy life; nor

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Miss Winstanley.

does his withered soul suppose that hers expands. Want of fatherly feeling produces want of filial feeling; and she comes to value money only as the means of procuring the withheld enjoyments of life. She breaks what is only a blood-relationship to establish a new moral relationship by marriage. Launcelot asks his father's blessing—and here we see the two Gobbos related to the whole. When he hears of Jessica's doings in Genoa, Shylock reveals himself in all the nakedness of his degradation, with no spark of human feeling or idea of moral laws and social ties. The trial scene is said to excite excessive horror and disgust—but as the story is familiar to the audience horror loses its edge. Judaism is the essential element of Shylock's character; thence he derived formal righteousness, Jewish logic, bitter sarcasm, spirit of revenge. Revenge is a duty to those who believe in an avenging God. But the letter which is his God turns with a fatal effect against himself. In the Middle Ages it was thought that only Christians could be saved; therefore Shylock's enforced conversion would be considered a merciful punishment. To Shakespeare religion consisted in morality, not dogma, and through Shylock's deeper motives he expresses his personal conviction. If he introduces the conversion, it is because the drama to him is a mirror, and he gives us the world and history as they are. If the impression is sharp, Act V makes up by double sweetness. Nor is the charming little Utopia in Belmont unconnected with the idea of wealth—for only on a basis of wealth is such a life of self-conscious and unconstrained cheerfulness possible. Inner independence springs from outer; and Portia might have a touch of the masculine, and be a victim to emancipation but for her father's will. She resigns herself and her possessions to her husband, because she is made conscious of those moral ties which unite society. Bassanio is in quest of wealth, yet he has preserved a firm and true character, and loves Portia more than her wealth. To Shylock possession is all—to Antonio nothing, not even a means to enjoy life. Shylock who lives and gains for self is isolated—Antonio who gains for others is surrounded by friends, yet he has all, has nothing left to desire, and becomes indifferent to property and life.

In *All's Well* Shakespeare, who had so often described courtship, attempts a new point of view. If he makes Helena appear unwomanly, it is because he wishes to show her love in its strength and irresistibility. Bertram's good qualities are undeveloped; he is a wild colt caught and tamed by Helena. But the spiritual centre of the play does not lie in difference of rank. This would leave unexplained the reason why Bertram leaves his bride after the King has made her his equal in rank and fortune. The root is the psychological problem of Helena's character and courtship, to which all the other characters are placed in inner relation. . . .

Elze does good service in defining the significance of the external

actions of Shakespeare's characters relatively to the movements of the mind which begot them. It is an unavoidable error that at times he overvalues the external, as when he says that the King by ennobling Helena has made her Bertram's equal—forgetting the aristocrat's pride in ancient descent. Nor need we be told that a basis of wealth made Belmont possible. In the latter case he has strained the meaning to complete his own theory. He is at his best in reminding us that the clowns of *M.N.D.* were English tradesmen, and in explaining Shylock's Judaism, Jessica's revolt, Antonio's world-weariness, Bassanio's truth. On the whole he is more interested in outer than inner—in men's actions than their causes—and he leaves his reader with eyes fixed upon earth rather than raised to the stars. But he has read the criticisms of others to good purpose, and it is in this interval—when he is pondering their theories—that his own mind is stimulated.

## XI

THESE critics are preoccupied with the particular rather than the general, and it is hard to extract from them any definite general remarks about Shakespeare. Implicit, however, if not explicit in their writings, is the assumption that he was great above all as moralist, and an impartial and objective delineator of character. Heyse calls him the greatest delineator of character in romantic literature. Kuno Fischer says that character was everything with him, the source of all action—his characters were distinct individuals, more than types. According to Oechelhäuser he sees in history the eternal laws of human nature, and describes from the point of view of humanity and reverence, above party politics. Elze says that he is genuinely national, is interested in character, not story—speaks of his objectivity, and calls him a great searcher of hearts—also that he exalts genuine womanliness and has created immortal ideals of feminine feeling and life. Werner gives him correct knowledge of nature, in which the moral predominates. König similarly unites moral and psychological: he calls Shakespeare's nature double-sided, because he sees good in bad, and the reverse. Also he understands that the energy and activity of man thrive only when based on justice and truth. For Heyse he is incorruptibly honest, son of Mother Nature, a moralist. Elze remarks that he perfected all existing dramatic species. . . .

The speculative shadow may be lighter, but it is still there. We miss any kind of suggestion that it is the business of the artist to please.

## Chapter XXII

### GERMANY 1873-1875

I. BENEDIX. II. SCHMIDT. III. KÖNIG. IV. RÜMELIN. V. FRIESEN.  
VI. GRILLPARZER. VII. THÜMMEL. VIII. CONCLUSION.

#### I

**R**ODERICK BENEDIX<sup>1</sup> writes not against Shakespeare himself, but against those who assert that all he wrote was perfect. Hamlet's address to the players is theatrical, not dramatic, and contributes in no way to develop the plot. Shakespeare's plays swarm with superfluous roles: they include representative figures—princes, burgomasters, unnamed soldiers or robbers—that every good dramatist avoids. The first scene of *John* is episodic and highly repugnant: and a dozen men of highest rank attend as listeners. In Acts II and III there are two great battles that have no result and do not influence the general action. The diffuse episode of the Bastard and the Duke of Austria is inserted to gratify the taste of the people on account of Richard Cœur de Lion. There is much poetry in Constance's lament, but to be justified in the drama it must have a result. It should either soften the enemy or determine her friends to action, but it does neither. As the blinding of Arthur does not take place the threatening has no result, so the whole scene is an episode, and the audience unnecessarily alarmed. Tragedy should certainly awake fear and pity, but by human means, not those of the executioner. The scene with the prophet may be an historic fact, but it is not a dramatic fact, and does not fit into the play. Indeed, the play runs on to its close in a succession of isolated scenes, each episodic in character.<sup>2</sup> John's death is entirely unconnected with the motive of the play. He dies and the play is finished, but there is no solution of the troubled conditions.

The characters are morally worthless, and many of them have a name only and no character. John is neither fit to be handled poetically nor dramatically—but is more suited for comedy. Arthur is too precocious, and his pleading speech to Hubert is unnaturally ornamental. The Cardinal is a chief character, a genuine priest, with all the presumption peculiar to priesthood—although this is hardly expressed in his speech. He is verbose and sophistical but not eloquent. Constance's speech that expresses sorrow is beautiful, but she is too abusive: we sympathize with the suffering woman, not with the scold. Falconbridge is the outstanding character, and personifies John Bull. The English love violence, at times even to brutality; but with his less pleasant qualities he has a lively sense of justice, shown in his fine

<sup>1</sup> *Shakespearomanie*, 1873.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Stoll, Schücking, and others.

moral anger over Arthur's ill-treatment. Such a character alone suffices to prove Shakespeare a great poet.

The result of the first act of *Richard II* is Bolingbroke's banishment—for which there is no excuse—and all the rest is theatrical accessory—perhaps historical but not dramatic. The events of the following acts tumble over each other: happenings separated by months culminate in a few minutes, and time and place are too arbitrarily treated. The scene where Aumerle is accused on all sides abounds in big words, but absolutely nothing comes of it, not even a duel. Much that is moving in the King's abdication scene is prejudiced by his weakly attitude. If ever a prince deserved to be dethroned it was Richard II—tyrannical, wasteful, oppressive. If ever a usurper was justified it was Bolingbroke, but he is unsympathetic. Richard is a poetic contrast to him, but lyric outbursts are not lawful in drama.

Richard III's 'I am determined to prove a villain' is psychologically false.<sup>1</sup> Wicked men deceive themselves and try to come to terms with their conscience. In spite of this Shakespeare-maniacs applaud his profound knowledge and unveiling of the human soul. Shakespeare was always inclined to exaggerate, and wished to depict such a villain as never existed. At the same time Richard is the only interesting character in the play, with qualities that we respect, such as mental power and courage. All that Margaret does is to abuse, though she acquits herself with masterly power. She is among the most unpleasant figures of creative poetry.

*R. and J.* is far superior to the above plays: the scenes do not merely follow, but are born of one another. Juliet is Shakespeare's most successful woman character, and her death-sleep the most wildly romantic episode ever invented. But if Romeo could come and go unperceived, why not she? It is also a fault that the issue of a tragedy should depend on chance.

It is unnatural for men to talk and scold in a storm, as they do at the opening of the *Tempest*. Prospero confesses that he neglected his duties, and is justly driven away—yet he always speaks as if a great wrong had been done him. If he possessed such magic powers, why did he not detect and defeat the plot against himself? Shakespeare's adorers call Miranda the darling of perfect innocence; but we rather think her inexperienced, for she could hardly be other than innocent, having lived on the island from the age of three. Her words, 'prompt me, plain and holy innocence!' are ludicrous—since true innocence knows nothing of non-innocence, or the reverse. She is somehow well instructed in the ways of a woman with a man—and one can hardly perceive plain and holy innocence in the offer of herself to Ferdinand. She is none the less lovable—and that Shakespeare should disfigure her with this speech does not prove his mastery of character-drawing.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Stoll.

Prospero, in the interests of dramatic propriety, might have lectured Ferdinand on chastity behind the scenes. It is also undramatic that the rascals should concert together to kill Prospero and do nothing. Shakespeare-maniacs have admired Caliban, but he is the most abominable aberration conceived by any poet. He has no glimpse of moral sense, and is cowardly and cunning. He is not an abortion of nature, but of a poet's imagination. The authorities should put such a creature under supervision. To what purpose does Shakespeare bring him on the stage? He does not advance the tale and is dramatically worthless. Trinculo and Stephano, with whom he appears, represent the comic element: for Shakespeare strangely finds drunkenness comic.

The whole mystery of *Hamlet* is due to errors in composition. There is a series of undramatic episodes—such as journeys and embassies—that take months, and to these Hamlet's mysterious procrastination is due. Eliminate the episodes, and all becomes clear; the action really takes only a few days, and we lose sight of Hamlet's irresolution. He hesitates at first rightfully, to do away with all doubt, and arranges the play. Then he thrusts Polonius through in mistake for the King—but instead of renewing his attack on the King he lets himself be sent to England. The whole of Act IV seems arbitrarily inserted to make up the five acts. It is not profundity, as admirers call it, but inconsequence. Hamlet had truly loved Ophelia and should not treat her so abominably in his feigned madness. In the original she was a court lady who acts as spy, and this character has been transferred to her now: but as Shakespeare has added the incident of Hamlet's love, the drawing is out of line.

Horatio is entirely pleasing, one of Shakespeare's best characters. The death of Polonius is not sufficient cause for Ophelia's madness. No girl goes out of her mind because her father dies, especially where relations have been more formal than familiar. In Hamlet's death there is no poetic justice, for weakness of will is a characteristic, not a sin. The final slaughter is suitable for an iron-nerved public delighting in bloodshed. The Ghost's first appearance in Act I is superfluous, since its message was to Hamlet. In the fight between Hamlet and Laertes it is not conceivable that men could thus change weapons. The conclusion is clumsy, for the tragic issues of a drama should be inherent in the play. We know that Richard III and Macbeth must end tragically, but there is no necessity with Hamlet.

That a girl should be slandered and maltreated, as in *M. Ado*, is hardly the subject for a comedy—and it is degrading that she should marry her slanderer. Only the two leading characters, Benedict and Beatrice, are of real interest. Beatrice surpasses all the others by becoming her cousin's champion. The wit-combats may be diffuse, but there are some excellent conceits. There are other amusing comic figures—caricatures—but still overdone. As to structure, events do



not lead to relative result: there lacks serious atonement to Hero. The play being a comedy, there is general reconciliation, but a deep-laid dramatic plot should not merely die out. The marriage is scandalously interrupted, only to be postponed. . . .

It is needless to say that what Matthew Arnold would call an 'inhuman want of humour' informs this criticism, and it most appears in the judgement of the play we have just left behind, and also the *Tempest*. Otherwise the chief thing to note about Benedix is that he lacks historic sense. He does not realize that when Shakespeare wrote his early historical plays the drama was but half-emerged, and all the audience looked for was a succession of loosely connected scenes. He has fixed ideas of what the drama should be—that, true to its name, it should give action, not talk—that the plot is the chief thing, and every episode is a hindrance. We naturally ask ourselves two questions: How far is this criticism true? If true, how far does it diminish the glory of Shakespeare? To the first we reply, 'Partially'—to the second, 'Not at all'. We must, however, keep in mind the object of the book, which is less to depreciate Shakespeare than his critics. No doubt at the present day, owing to the spread of education and the higher general level of accomplishment in writers and intelligence in audiences, there are scores of plays more perfectly mechanically constructed than Shakespeare's: but if the mountain range is more continuous, the peaks of genius are depressed. Much of this technical accomplishment, which can be learned, has been re-applied to criticism, and the outer Shakespearian fabric has been found wanting in places, e.g. it has been said and resaid that Antonio, with his friends and credit, could have raised a hundred times over the sum required to save him from Shylock. But modern criticism differs in that it recognizes the inner soul of Shakespeare's poetry to be untouched; while, according to Benedix, the diseases of the body dim the lustre of the soul. If he shows any insight it is with the characters of Richard III and Ophelia.

## II

JULIAN SCHMIDT<sup>1</sup> finds *Hamlet* admirably thought out and planned, but notes that the composition and structure do not correspond to the first plan. The poet, like his hero, loses his way, and many single scenes are superfluous and retarding—with the result that some critics have condemned the play as tedious. The mistake is to approach Shakespeare by the understanding alone, e.g. without Tieck's staging of *M.N.D.* and all the colouring and atmosphere, it would make but a mediocre impression. Not that colour is enough without intellectual background, but there is also symbolic meaning. Shakespeare did not mean that love—and life—is a dream, but that all love is a dream and

<sup>1</sup> *Neue Bilder aus dem Geistigen Leben unserer Zeit*, 1873.

something more. To understand life fully one must realize that, whatsoever else it is, it is also a dream.

We recognize in *Hamlet*, as the scenes progress, that there is something quite different from the actual story. As in *M.N.D.* we are aware of colour, but that of night: no colour that suggests life, but cold, grey, ghostly. The whole earth is a churchyard, and the skulls which the Clown throws out are the only realities of life. *Hamlet* appears highly gifted, and delicately strung, having cherished long, true love to Ophelia. It has vanished and he can even be rude and coarse to his beloved: he understands himself as little as he does the world. But is he only a Danish prince whose head has been turned by philosophical studies, whom his mother's infidelity and uncle's crime have wholly distraught? Surely there is something more behind.

Under the surface of life are deep abysses which at moments are laid open—the realm of death and madness. To the strongest mind come intervals when consciousness and will seem but a self-illusion and chaos the only reality. It then keenly penetrates characters like Polonius, who is usually considered a shrewd man. *Hamlet* quizzes him and throws contempt upon himself also: and it is thus with the whole world led by secret strings in the hands of a miserable king. Can chastisement of such creatures be a worthy task for a man of thought and feeling? Is even death a reality? Is he not, perhaps, the dupe of dreams that lead to madness even in the Beyond? This is the dark background of life, above which the philosopher must rise, and the poet may represent.

We cannot explain how Shakespeare, an individual man, felt and expressed all these moods of soul. The world of *Hamlet* is no more his whole world than that of *M.N.D.*, but it is a part, a moment of his world. There were times when what Schopenhauer calls Nirvana vibrated through him to the depths; and at one such moment he took up the traditional tale of *Hamlet* and fashioned it as we know. Let *Hamlet* be analysed from this standpoint, viz. that the poet wished to express every shade and side of this precise form of feeling, and then the scenes which appear most difficult to reconcile to the logic of the drama will be most clearly understood. The world of *Hamlet* is as truly a dream as *M.N.D.*—but a terrible tormenting dream—and both plays conclude with an awakening. *M.N.D.* concludes with the Duke's arrival with horns and attendants; *Hamlet* with the arrival of Fortinbras with drums and fanfare—the man of a new world, vigorous, resolute, inaccessible to ghostly visions. . . .

Schmidt does well to emphasize that we cannot approach Shakespeare with the understanding alone, and he is more or less conscious of the great mystery that underlies human life. He also says well that *Hamlet* may not have considered punishment of such miserable creatures worth while. But his mistake is, as with many of his country-

men, to drive a logical road through the country of the imagination. According to him, as soon as we grasp his theory all the difficulties connected with Hamlet disappear. This is the spirit in which Max Nordau pronounced Rossetti an idiot, or Haeckel confidently informed the world that we have got rid of 'God, freedom, and immortality' in favour of contemplation of nature.

### III

WILHELM KÖNIG<sup>1</sup> denies that love was the all-engrossing theme to Shakespeare as to other Christian poets.<sup>2</sup> Neither does he idealize it, but represents its various grades, and shows it under every kind of influence from the surrounding world and events, and in combination and conflict with other passions. In few of his works is it the chief subject or mainspring of events. We except *R. and J.*, but in the remaining tragedies other passions prevail; or, if love, it is rather certain individual degeneracies, as in *Othello* and *A. and C.*, or else events conflict with it and bring about tragic issue. Only *R. and J.* shows its noblest form—its power over virgin hearts. No doubt in *Cymbeline* we see conjugal love—but the play is less occupied with the origin and nature of love than with firmly set affection struggling with dangers. Love relations in *W. Tale* and *Tempest* are beautiful and tender, but there is still something less essential about love. Perhaps Shakespeare's age or family relations influenced him: we see a cooler, more paternal sentiment.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, love is given more room in the comedies, and it is difficult to choose a counterpart to *R. and J.*

That of *M.N.D.* is too purely fantastic—though it is true that Shakespeare, the faithful portrayer of real life, has a fantastic background to all his plays, even the histories. Where there are neither elves nor fairies the scene at least is laid in some distant land, called by a real name, but romantically transposed and described, with an element of the marvellous in plot and situation. The *Wives* is the only comedy of his time, but even here place and people are not conspicuously individualized, and a fantastic element is in the last act. It is not a comedy of love, but perhaps *Verona* and *L.L.L.* may be so called. In the first we see love constant and inconstant, and also friendship at war with love. In the second, love is not very marked in the ladies; and there is actually less love than a foolish and exaggerated avoidance of it, whereby the plot thickens and agitates the somewhat simple and quiet course of action. Love in the *Shrew* is superficial, as in all Italian tales. Helena (*All's Well*) loves more truly, and the play is a counterpart to the *Shrew*: yet it can scarcely be called a love drama. Comic confusion prevails in *Errors*, and love and

<sup>1</sup> 'Twelfth-Night: A Comic Counterpart to *R. and J.*' (*Jahrbuch*, 1873).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Henry Mackenzie (1780).

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Dowden.

jealousy incidentally import. *M. Ado* is still less a love comedy. On one hand, useless evading of love leads to comic entanglement; on the other, the love of Hero and Claudio is threatened by a malicious intrigue, and saved by chance circumstances, all tolerably transparent. *A.Y.L.* is more truly a comedy of love, with its many pairs of lovers and manifold modifications of love, and where more is said about love than in any other play. Yet it is still a pastoral drama; the idyllic predominates; and it is not love which sets the scenes in motion, or which Shakespeare wishes to express.

*Twelfth-Night* is the only love comedy, and the true counterpart to *R. and J.* Love is the mainspring of the action, and the chief content of the play to the exclusion of other elements and passions. In *R. and J.* and *Twelfth-Night* Shakespeare portrays two species of love—the deep, fervent, unalterable affection of the heart—and the fleeting delight of the eye. He calls the latter Fancy, and usually love is the subject of tragedy and fancy of comedy; but in these two contrasting examples we find in each elements of the other—and so we find them mingled elsewhere—even as in life. . . .

König here applies his theory with skill and moderation. He has not formed it prematurely and compelled the facts to submit to it in Procrustean fashion, but has let it steal into his mind and complete itself at leisure. The result is that we follow his lead and look at the plays from his angle—though it must be admitted that the new light he throws lasts but the fraction of a second. At this point we are content to leave him—though it would be possible to assail some of his positions—notably his judgement of *A.Y.L.*

#### IV

GUSTAV RÜMELIN<sup>1</sup> contrasts the unanimous appreciation of Shakespeare with its incredibly varied forms. Because we have little exact knowledge of him, fancy has been given free play to disregard the limits which condition the working of the most gifted individual, and Shakespeare has been transported beyond time and space. The most casual reference is made to the ideas of his time, and the critic has full scope for his own subjectivity. Shakespeare is represented as Catholic, Protestant, sceptic, free-thinker, Whig, Tory, &c.

The fact that Shakespeare sold his manuscript to the theatre where he acted, and of which he was a director, proves that stage effect was his conscious aim.<sup>2</sup> He did not write for German professors of aesthetics, whose chief concern is the basic idea; he aimed to interest his audience in the immediate scene, and so long as he avoided glaring contradictions was not over-anxious about the harmony of the whole. No dramatic poet has made such extensive use of the episode, and he would characteristically, when returning to an old play, alter

<sup>1</sup> *Sh. Studies*, 1874.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Grant White.

details and insert pictures, witticisms, phrases. The result is there are no halting passages, the diction is almost over-rich, and the firm structure of the whole suffers under the increasing burden of the parts. The poet in his later version never quite succeeds in recapturing fully the mood of the earlier. We must also remember the nature of the audience: it was the gilded youth who predominated at the theatre, and among whom Shakespeare found his first patrons and admirers.<sup>1</sup> His care was to please the young English nobles, though his genius developed independently, and he gave a greater impulse than he received. Sensibility to poetic beauty is keenest in youth, and it is important to realize this in connexion with Shakespeare. It helps us to understand his charm as of eternal youth, his enthusiastic, energetic, action-loving manliness, the absence of gloom and surliness. He delighted in wild and terrible pictures of character, abrupt and instantaneous revulsions, even contradictory features. This may have been native to him as well as his audience, but the Sonnets prove that he had another character also. In these he plays with his feelings, is visionary and self-tormenting, vague, and far-fetched. To dramatize this element required the outer impulse, which failed in face of youth, and only now and then—e.g. in *Hamlet*—did he strike this note, when his position and fame were established. His audience thus decided that his subject should be unusual and varied action. The ground theme, returning with every possible variation, is love and jealousy—the two strongest moving powers of noble young-manhood; and the social background is aristocratic. But there were the pit and gallery also to be considered, and for these he introduced scenes of low comedy into grave pieces: though such scenes become rarer as he gained independence.

Another essential part of his audience was the clique of literati who supplied the theatres with plays. There was rivalry between theatres, and it did not suffice for the groundlings to applaud if the literati shrugged shoulders. Shakespeare must think of Greene, Marlowe, Jonson, &c.; and this explains characteristics that have been considered individual. We are struck by his similarity to these writers in style, tone, subject, range of ideas, especially in his youthful plays—their high-flown, unrestrained, and forced thought and expression.<sup>2</sup>

Because Shakespeare was thoroughly human, he was internally a Proteus who could multiply his own self-consciousness. His dream-world was reinforced by intellectual power of observation. We need say little of his commonplace characters, but where we get his impression of vital truth is from the characters in whose self-consciousness we feel ourselves absorbed. We feel his power to illuminate our ordinary self-consciousness till it glows with his own. A character that falls short of this goal remains strange to us. No poet can equal him in presenting copies of his visions by means of inspired diction, but a

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Brandes and Sisson.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. J. M. Robertson.

dramatic poet needs more than knowledge of human nature and inner experience. He must know the general influence of opposing forces—he must know life from personal share in its activities. Shakespeare's education and position as actor made it impossible that he should possess to a high degree this world-understanding. His audience did not demand it, but preferred the improbable and adventurous. His characters willingly ignore the restrictions of society and circumstance. Their loves, hates, jealousies are extreme; and intellect inflames rather than guides passion. They stand out grand and impressive, and popular with the mass, contrasted with the more delicate lines of Goethe's figures. To individualize (a kind of miniature painting) is alien from the tragic poet; but Shakespeare does it by concentrating on a few exceptionally strong features—such as deformity of person and unscrupulous pursuit of power in Richard III. With Shakespeare and his fellows facts do not clash, but lie easily side by side—facts that are irrevocable and far-reaching in real life. Shakespeare is not bound by logical consequences: he will tax our credulity as regards disguise or likeness of persons; he mingles past and present, antiquity, the Middle Ages. Blind admirers praise him for his faults, but it is nearer the truth that he was separated by unfavourable circumstances from the practical life and activities of middle-class society, and the learning and culture of his day, and the wonder is that he made so much out of little, and with the tact of genius supplied abundantly what failed him, and avoided the worst mistakes. He conceived imperfectly the stern causal concatenation of the course of the world and human conditions. There is much that is improbable in nearly all his plays, much faulty psychology and offence to realism—and hence limit to artistic development.

The opening scene of *Lear* is absurd—as if a cake were divided among children and the largest piece promised to the one who asks most prettily. It is rather the introduction to a child's tale than an overwhelming tragedy, and the man who acts like Lear has not much understanding left to lose; nor is the Gloucester episode much more credible. The much-admired hovel scene, with its length and increasing stream of mad talk, grows wearisome. Kent behaves so roughly to Oswald that his punishment is deserved; and Oswald's touching trait of fidelity before death is inconsistent with his reprobate character. Of the eleven characters three only remain alive—and this is not the kind of stuff suitable for tragedy. The effect of serious drama is based on the belief that we are of the same nature as the dramatic characters—that what takes place on the stage befalls mankind in general; though the supernatural may be introduced when related to the historical background. Gods, spirits, oracles take the place of fate and chance—but one thing must remain intact—the psychological basis of all human action. It is undeniable that *Lear* leaves a great impression, and this has been given symbolic reasons. It is said to transport us to a primitive

world of fable where characters touch the extremes of good and evil. If the original story had this symbolic ground-tone Shakespeare did not fit his borrowed material to it, but mingled promiscuously historical, mythical, symbolical, childish fable, and the deep seriousness of life.

Among Shakespeare's male characters Posthumus (*Cymbeline*) is the noblest and most idealistically sustained figure; and among the serious plays it is the most romantic and adventurous in plot. The appearance of Jupiter is the strangest phantasm throughout Shakespeare's plays: as if he wished to prove that he knew something of Latin and mythology. In a fantastic comedy we delight to see together Theseus, Oberon, Quince; but in a serious play we doubt if we wake or dream at the sight of Tribunes, Augurs, French and Italian knights, pistol shooting, cards and skittles, and then Jupiter riding on an eagle. Instead of unity and harmony of the whole, and inner necessity of the action, we see the principle carried out in practice, that single parts must interest and amuse. The court scenes, the wager scene, the idyll of the lost sons, the Roman battles, the final clearing up of riddles are so many lively pictures held together by a single interest.

*Othello* proves that where the intrigue is clearly carried out and pragmatically sound, the poet has to thank his source which he follows closely; but when he spins his own threads there is lack of motive, e.g. *Othello's* dismissal from office in favour of Cassio. Iago is not consistent to the end, being deserted by his *sang-froid* and cunning. He kills his wife before witnesses to force her to hold her tongue, when she has already told all that she knew; and she has nothing to bring against him but that he excited *Othello's* jealousy. Where are the presence of mind, lies, and tricks of the crafty, inventive rascal? Since *Desdemona* was dead he might have lied at any cost, and insisted on her infidelity. It is here, however, that we see Shakespeare's moral outlook: vice and cunning fall into a self-made ditch and become stupidly short-sighted.

If the Witches in *Macbeth* are not objective, but symbols of mental anxieties, &c., the action would not be comprehensible. They prophesy the future exactly, but only one of their oracles meets with a thought already existing in *Macbeth*—the prophecy that he should be king. They are not heavenly powers that control man, but devils that tempt him and rejoice in evil. That Shakespeare meant them to be objective beings is proved by the scene where they gather together alone. The play is the best composed in Shakespeare, being unified, compact, and the action harmonized with character-development. Only some of the subordinate matters lack clearness, e.g. a more special motive is needed for the sudden flight of the king's sons, since *Malcolm* had been named as *Duncan's* successor. Nor does the motive for *Banquo's* murder suffice, since *Macbeth* had no sons, and *Banquo's* sons would naturally inherit from their father who was of the royal house. Either

Macbeth was thinking that he might still have sons, or Shakespeare was working scene-wise. There is some difficulty about Lady Macbeth's character, though not in the sense of any doubt of Shakespeare's design. Her behaviour before and after the deed contradicts the psychological law of unchangeableness and fixity which Shakespeare usually maintains. It is not a psychological and understandable effect, but something magical and demoniacal that is attributed to conscience. To feel gnawing remorse for a crime, a disgust of self even to madness, shows great sensitiveness to moral emotion. Even this is compatible with crime, for one soul may harbour contrary instincts and desires, and in a moment of wild excitement passion may overwhelm conscience. But the icily cold reflection with which Lady Macbeth incites her husband to the deed and despises conscience as womanly weakness, the inhuman savagery with which she speaks of what she could do to her smiling infant—all this we cannot reconcile. The Eumenides arrive late, and are like demons from without, whereas the poet should have shown they had long waited lurking within her, and explained their violent assault by the long suppression of the nobler impulses. It is a point of genius that she is kept in the background in the later part and appears only in the night scene; but we must not assume that she was herself by daylight and only a prey to conscience in the unarmed hours of sleep. We believe that she exercised outer control over herself by day—since conscience would evaporate into a magic power if it only worked in dreams, and psychology be brought to naught. We also miss something in Macbeth's character, described as noble before the crime. When his goal was attained we would expect his better nature to reappear—that he would try to atone for his crime by glorious deeds: instead of which he advances from one crime to another like a madman, and his former better nature never appears. Here Shakespeare exaggerates contrast and effect at the cost of psychological truth, for an entire revulsion of the essential character is a matter of illusion. No idea of development in man or nature can be grasped without continuity.

Goethe's explanation of Hamlet is no key to the whole: the question remains, What made him unable to fulfil his task? Disharmony between his nature and the deed has been suggested, but a thousand times over men have accomplished what repels them. There must be lack of essential qualities—courage, determination, composure, endurance, self-control, experience, sagacity. But is Shakespeare's Hamlet merely a visionary, sick with thought, incapable of action? He follows the Ghost alone, kills two guiltless men, boards the pirate ship—is honoured by the people, the hope of the State, sparkles with intellect. Did he not accuse himself of indecision it would not have occurred to us; and it proves that he was obsessed by the thought of his task. One reproach we may truly make, that he had no plan, and nothing to gain by



assumed madness. Neither his speeches nor his measures enlighten us, and we are left in worse doubt whether Shakespeare wishes us to recognize that his hero lacks something, or whether the effect is unintentional and in the manner of portrayal. Had he wished to emphasize Hamlet's incapacity for action he would have ended the matter otherwise. He was not wont to draw with too fine or uncertain lines, but rather to exaggerate. Had he wished to show a morbid and ineffective visionary he would have helped to make it plain by quoting the judgement of others and contrasting characters; but no one in the play, not even Horatio, judges him in this respect. Laertes is said to be a contrast, but he, too, acts inconsequently, as does the King. After the murder of Polonius the King might have got rid of Hamlet—which it was his interest to do—but he hushes it up and brings suspicion on himself. Laertes, after his outburst, behaves as if nothing had happened, and enters into a secret plot against Hamlet. This lack of realistic treatment contrasts with the old saga where all hangs well together. After his return from England he behaves more strangely than ever. He leaps into the grave and wrestles with Laertes; and shortly after calls for foils and plays—and finally a most unlikely change of rapiers brings the catastrophe—all like the shifting pictures of a vision.

To the many previous interpretations we add another. Hamlet of the saga assumed madness to lull suspicion, and under the mask of wild talk expressed hidden wisdom. Shakespeare himself had grown from youth to manhood, and through many mistakes and inner and outer conflicts gathered a store of deep wisdom and longed to express it poetically. The tale of Hamlet became the vehicle for his own experience, without betraying himself to the public. Like Hamlet he had entered the world full of ideals, to meet with an abyss of degeneracy, weakness, and evil. His melancholy found vent in speech unintelligible to the crowd, and seemingly the ravings of a madman. Hamlet is Shakespeare's greatest character, but the play suffers from the alien subjective element.<sup>1</sup> Modern sensibility does not fit the old story—the killing of Polonius, and treachery to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Hamlet's reproaches to his mother prove too much—that the crime was not only inexcusable but inconceivable. If all is true, about her age, and the contrast of the two husbands, why did she break her marriage vows? An action without conceivable motive loses reality—and the Ghost gives hints which Hamlet ignores. Even the famous 'To be' soliloquy is episodic, and presents a different religion from the popular religion of the rest of the play. It sets unsolved questions against a definite purgatory. The characters besides Hamlet are enigmatic, e.g. Polonius, submissive and talkative at court, and experienced man of the world in his family.<sup>2</sup> Laertes is brave and knightly, but behaves like a dastard in the last act. With Ophelia we

<sup>1</sup> Cf. J. M. Robertson.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Ludwig (1851-60).

have to accept her madness as the natural consequence of causes of which we are in darkness.

In the historical plays Shakespeare compensated by his great knowledge of man for his lesser knowledge of history and linked human actions and fate. He shows us men and probes their depths, but portrays the characters of nations and periods only superficially. Character and casualties are the two agents; we miss the appearance of necessity required to develop the dramatic plot. Without unity, with but a succession of loosely jointed scenes, in spite of beauty in detail, the great charm of all dramatic art is lost. *Henry IV* owes its exceptional interest to non-historical episodes—and as a whole the historical plays are like a picture gallery. The middle classes, whose rise was the chief event of the times, are ignored, and he represents to his young distinguished friends the deeds of the great ones of their nation. The leading idea is that a higher tribunal decides the fate of great men, a majestic connexion between guilt and punishment. Of the power and effect of certain social conditions there is no word, and war is represented in a childish heroic manner. There is no hint that the English bowmen decided Agincourt. Only *Richard III* is complete in itself; the great characters of *Henry IV* make us forget its defects. The downfall of Richard II comes by chance; there is no clear connexion throughout *John*, and no part thoroughly developed. Shakespeare's Richard III, in spite of his great intelligence, acts like a maniac, and exterminates the House of York for which he had fought, and makes the Lancastrian claimant his natural successor. He should not have tempted the powerful Buckingham to turn against him, and the scene of the wooing of Anne is, above all, incredible.

The Roman plays have unity of action and intelligibility; the heroes have neither historical nor national colouring, but think and speak like English princes and barons. There is a warmer tone, a local colouring, but little of ancient customs or ways of thought. In a municipal commonwealth no single person could rise to such a colossal height as Coriolanus: he is more like a northern giant, a Siegfried. The play consists of a connected series of inconceivabilities. If the nobility possessed no means of defence, Coriolanus could not have addressed the plebeians in open assembly as he did. That the Volscians should receive back joyfully their deadly enemy is unintelligible.

*J.C.* is the most perfect play, but now and then Shakespeare appears insecure on ancient ground. Police regulations that artisans should not appear on working days without sign of profession are impossible. A chapter of Caesar's Commentaries would have saved Shakespeare from putting the absurd speeches that he does into Caesar's mouth. Nor in those days did enemy generals parley before battle and abuse each other. And in the quarrel scene between Brutus and Cassius reproaches go too far for speedy reconciliation.

*A. and C.* is overloaded and confused: the battle of Actium becomes nothing more than a hundred other events. Everything moves in small jolts, and nothing makes a deep impression. The picture of Antony lacks strength and grandeur, and we doubt him as lord of half the earth. Yet there is such brilliance in speech and representation as to create a vivid feeling that we are now in the element of splendid world affairs, now transported to the magic gardens of the serpent of old Nile.

Though *Timon* carries us into the world of Greece, the Hellenic atmosphere fails throughout completely. Alcibiades lived in the blossoming time of Athens—with Socrates, Aristophanes, Euripides—but we are not conscious of this, or of any distinct period. With the tact of genius Shakespeare could transport himself into the Roman world, but the Greek is a blank to him. He gives the gloomiest picture of the hatred of men and the world on the theatre of the liveliest and sunniest national life. *Timon's* lavishness is that of a madman, and we cannot help thinking that his acquaintances acted wisely in refusing to lend him money. Nowhere is the incongruity between the worth of the actual tale and its inner contents so patent as in *Timon*. Shakespeare had become indifferent to the story and was expressing his own thoughts. He never saw clearly that the effect of tragedy rests on the relation between action and character—that he should not merely take an anecdote and hang on it wit and wisdom. It was the fashion to choose incredible subjects, and the public cared only what the poet made out of his subject—not whether or no the subject was fused. Herein lies the limitation of Shakespeare's art: true characters do not let themselves be placed in wrong situations. No one has surpassed him in assigning right feeling and words to given characters in given situations; but he does not harmonize situations and characters. He takes a subject indiscriminately, and throws the mantle of genius over the hump-back. In *T. and C.*, for instance, Ulysses delivers a long unnecessary speech on rank, which is either ironical or cannot be explained.

The qualities which hindered in serious plays serve in the comedies; when we have only to laugh and be merry the arbitrary and impossible are welcome. Shakespeare is at his best where his wonderful imagination has full play, and he gives a habitation to airy nothings: at his weakest when he enters the uncongenial bourgeois world. *M.N.D.* is his most enchanting and original work, where he is unique and unrivalled. We rank the *Tempest* below it, for there we let the marvellous things befall us, and follow amazed, if not without head-shaking and struggle. The *Merchant* is only thinly divided from fairyland, and thus the grave episode of the Jew is incongruous: although Shylock is not entirely removed from comedy, and the whole is palpably drawn with farcical intent. Those who praise Shakespeare's legal knowledge

cannot themselves be versed in the law. Portia's grounds of decision are not logical, though clever enough to serve the purpose. One condition is that he must take neither more nor less than the pound: but the *less* would be no breach of law. . . .

Among Rümelin's judgements are some of so absurd a character that his critic might well dismiss him in a breath. The most blatant of these are—that perhaps Macbeth thought he might still have sons—that the police regulations of *J.C.* are improbable—that Timon's friends were right in refusing to lend money—and Shylock would not be breaking the law in taking *less* than his pound. However, turning from particular to general, we note that he praises Shakespeare for knowledge of character, poetry, and imagination, and above all he selects *M.N.D.* He will thus appear the victim of a false critical method imposed from without rather than radically bad taste. He condemns Shakespeare not for lack of inspiration, but for lack of the kind of technical knowledge that can be learned from others. We do not take seriously his suggestion that Shakespeare wrote only to please gilded youth, or that his social position hindered world-understanding—but we are more inclined to note as at least partially true the criticism that single parts interest more than the whole. In fine, we see in Rümelin the struggle between a bad critical fashion and good individual taste. He is less insensible to the inner poetical meaning of Shakespeare than many of his countrymen, and now and then, by a kindly stroke of fate, this very critical method which we deplore helps him to a pregnant judgement, e.g. that Hamlet is accused by self, not others, of indecision; and Macbeth's better nature should but does not appear after the crime.

## V

HERMANN FREIHERR VON FRIESEN<sup>1</sup> begins by remarking that Shakespeare excelled his contemporaries in power of speech. He has been called a courtly poet, and he is certainly aristocratic, but he is humorous rather than sarcastic towards the people. He has been praised as excessively compassionate, but he was rather negatively aloof, though aware of the subtlest workings of the human heart—severe objectivity that separates thing from person. United to this is a many-sided and impartial moral outlook; and every sect has claimed him as a co-religionist. In some of the plays where we see spirits from the other world, fate appears to rule. This is all one with his susceptibility to super-sensuous impressions, with the spread of ideas towards infinity. But no power that belongs exclusively to the ideal world is the motive force of action. Though chance may intervene, the final decision remains with man himself; yet we do not lose the sense of the divine and hidden ordering of the world. Finally, he has the deepest

<sup>1</sup> *Altengländ und Wm. Sh.*, 1874.

reverence for the highest moral and religious truths, and is true to the holiest principles on which human life is based—while retaining kindly indulgence to the weak mortal.

Even in *Titus* he perceives that tragic fate is not due to outward circumstances, nor yet to the inward raging of lower passions, but to inner conflict of a nobler kind, combined with outer surroundings and conditions. *Titus's* noblest qualities—courage and readiness to sacrifice himself for love of country—were fraught with tragic fate for him and others by the blinding of passion. In spite of exaggeration Shakespeare makes us sympathize with *Titus*.

*Henry VI* at least gives a living picture of a profoundly important historical epoch—as shown by the prophetic words put into the mouth of one or other. In Part II we see the warnings fulfilled, and we trace the connexion of events leading to the final decision for England of her political life. In Part III the threatened evil has become a fact. From the moment she appears upon the scene the Queen displays the defiant pride and overweening passion that leads to crime and then to her downfall and the murder of her son. Passion strives with overmastering circumstance and fate's necessity: yet Shakespeare arouses our pity for this wife and mother. Margaret (*Richard III*), who takes no part in the action, but recalls and curses, is like the Greek chorus. Every incident in the play is truly historical, in which it differs from the preceding plays. There is no greater tragic creation than *Richard III*, no bolder declaration of war against human and divine laws than, 'I am determined to be a villain'. The real catastrophe is not his death in battle, but the moral collapse of the dream scene.

The circumstance of the double twins and resulting mistakes in the *Errors* is unusual but not unnatural, nor absolutely improbable. The differing individualities of the brothers and the two chief women are clearly brought out, and on the whole the play is above farce. *Verona* with all its weaknesses shows signs of great poetic gift, and there are the finest traits of feeling in the women. *L.L.L.* is one of the most important plays for judging Shakespeare's poetic individuality; its language closely resembles that of the Sonnets. Here we have comedy in full blossom; and with all its mockery of the follies of the age it is entirely free from the satire which we rarely associate with true humour. The subject may lack, but all the actors are under the influence of a similar and humorous fate, in which their individual follies entangle them. The dramatic effect is due to the underlying earnestness that makes the King's death fitting—for no gentler shock would have given pause to such wanton gaiety. Shakespeare's poetic strength lies in his demonstration of the indestructible connexion between human action and suffering. *R. and J.* does not show love as something which the will can control, but as a power that possesses the individual like fate. Not only the lovers, but Montague, Capulet,

Tybalt display the same unbridled passion. No drama contains more pregnant lines on the revulsion of the noblest feelings leading to evil and sorrow. The essence of the tragedy is in the passionate surrender in defiance of the material world and pitiless temporal necessity. It is no atonement or punishment for sin, but merely the necessity of the tragic issue. The lovers strove beyond the bounds of the finite world, and are victims to its eternal laws.

Injustice, that affects every character, dominates *John*; its climax is in the King whose claim to the throne is doubtful. The Bastard is an exception, though it is uncertain if he is moved by the noblest motives or by egotism and the spirit of adventure. Though profoundly tragic in character the play lacks tragic completeness. The tragic interest is centred in no single individual. John is cause rather than subject of pity and fear; his death, not immediately connected with his crimes, has not the effect of the final act of a tragedy. However, Shakespeare's aim was to represent events as happy and fortunate for his country. The blank verse of *Richard II* is finer and more ingenious than hitherto, and the inward tone is lyrical. The play has proceeded out of a peculiar mood, akin to the Sonnets, *L.L.L.*, *R. and J.* It shows a far keener penetration into the secrets of men's feelings and passions than earlier works; and the poet's perfect objectivity is shown in his handling of the opposing forces, giving to each its just interpretation. He balances the right and wrong of the two sides, and while he arouses compassion for Richard, whose guilt he does not conceal, he acquiesces in Bolingbroke's action, though he exposes his breach of faith. The King's feelings are more those of a woman: and it thus seems natural that he should sport with his misery. Nothing is omitted that makes the present prophetic of the future; and each personality has its distinct mode of expression. The whole is a work of art of peculiar beauty—the offshoot of youthful and luxuriant imagination.

Perhaps the great advance in style of *1 Henry IV* is at the expense of the naïvety of the earlier period; but if the technique does not keep pace with the growing depth of thought and poetic grandeur, yet in single speeches—notably the King's—Shakespeare exerted all his powers. The character-drawing exceeds the earlier works; and if the portrait of the Prince is not historically correct, Shakespeare celebrates him poetically to the utmost, as Prince and King. Comic and serious are so mingled that neither detracts from the other, and the result is a great poetic and dramatic work of art. The noblest characters escape contagion, and it is true to life that the Prince's nobler nature is not injured by contact with those beneath him. The King appears so worthy of honour that we forget his usurpation. *Henry V* glows with inspiration and patriotism; the play becomes a true mirror of the age, and fulfils the dramatist's task as expressed by Hamlet.

With the youthful freshness and whole delightful magic picture of

*M.N.D.* are combined depth and gravity as from experience of riper age. No play springs more directly from Shakespeare's imagination, and is more harmoniously complete. The characterization is not developed, yet each person is delicately distinguished. The ruder characters remind us that marvels surround the commonest of the earth. Though magic prevails, we are shown the hidden depths of feeling—above all, the unfathomable significance of love. The characters of the *Merchant* keep pace with Shakespeare's increase of imaginative power. Portia has a noble personality, and Antonio is deep-feeling and earnest. Shylock leaves an impression of living experience—the result of close mingling of the ideal and fantastic with real life. In spite of a fairy atmosphere we allow all to be possible within the wide realm of actuality. No leading idea unifies *A.Y.L.*, and the poet moves, plays, laughs, and sings in an ideal world. Yet the fable embodies deep truths, for there is a hidden longing in man to escape from the pressure of the material world into that of fancy and fable. No poet shows us clearer how near lie jest and earnest, joy and sorrow: old Adam's fidelity moves us by contrast with the heartless brother—and Jaques and Touchstone contrast with the ideal realm. It is difficult to find an exact name for the atmosphere of *Twelfth-Night*. The whole plot turns on Viola's course of action, and the vague light tone would be spoilt by a more definite account of what had gone before. We see Shakespeare's doubled nature, in that with Viola and Olivia he is wholly romantic, while the comic figures are wholly Teutonic and belong to modern times.

With *M. Ado* we leave the region of fancy and enter the actual world. It is not possible to say exactly that during a certain period a certain mood predominated with Shakespeare, but it would seem that in 1601 a decided change came over the character of his plays. It hardly agrees with our ideas of noble character that the Prince and Claudio should spread the rumour of Hero's unchastity; and Claudio hardly atones by accepting readily another Hero. But these shortcomings help to carry out the title: as also the plot to make Benedict and Beatrice fall in love—which the cunning god of love had already privately brought to pass. In fine, though we miss tenderness and seriousness in moral matters, the play meets every requirement of comedy, being a true picture of the world in which men with their weaknesses, errors, and follies love to make much ado about nothing. *All's Well*, with its artificially tangled speech and metaphors, is a difficult problem of style. It lacks the simplicity of the earlier plays, and also their metrical care and exactness. Sense and end of verse seldom correspond; yet there is greater rhythmic variety—in movement of caesura and presence of anapaests. And yet, though style and verse point to a later period, there is something contrary to the usual tact and fine tenderness of feeling of Shakespeare's more developed

dramatic art. Bertram is unmoved by any real feeling of love, and awakens no sympathy.

*Hamlet* is an immortal work of art, and the whole gives the impression of splendid harmony; it is therefore useless to question its hidden tendencies or intentions. In early plays wickedness was crudely or ironically represented: here we get a new aspect of this conflict and striving even in the noblest natures. Shakespeare wins our sympathy for Hamlet by revealing his brilliant qualities, and he fully unmasks none of the bad characters. We see them as in social life, where custom, conditions, convenience at least soften our verdicts. We often incline to take part with the King or Queen or Laertes; and this partitioning of right and wrong shows the refinement of Shakespeare's method. The centre of the tragedy is the antagonism of delusive passions to the healthful activity of life. A fierce passion drives Hamlet to extremes; he assumes the part of madman, and his passion takes different mystifying forms. In the churchyard scene he declines from profound meditation to subtle sophistry and futile contemplation. On one hand, he is undecided, from a cause that we know not—on the other, he yields to every momentary impulse. The acutely judging, fine feeling Prince, whose qualities should have made him master of his fate, becomes its sport. He shows no sensitiveness in dispatching Polonius, and ignoring Ophelia's grief, and sacrificing Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. However, it is useless to attempt a solution; we must interpret the mystery as the alienation of his whole disposition from faith, love, and hope. It is beyond us to understand wherein lies the tragic guilt. When he assumed madness he renounced his gifts of mind and disposition, disowned honesty and truth against conscience, and, unconsciously, his own essential being. In the subversion of character that made this possible lay the hidden seeds of fate. His original character is given in Ophelia's words, and it fills us, even in its ruin, with a sense of fathomless mystery. The final catastrophe shows us the eternal and unshaken order of a ruling power.

The events of *Lear* do not happen by chance, but are brought about and explained by it, and we should ascribe this not to Shakespeare's positive intention, but his general outlook. He sees the close relationship between innermost consciousness of person and his surroundings, conditions, and experiences—all apparently governed by a common destiny: and this forbids partial judgement. Lear's caprice may seem absurd at first, but his later behaviour makes it credible; and his daughters flattered him because they knew his temper—as proved with Cordelia and Kent. Lear has kingly dignity, but passion leads him to express it wrongly; he is full of feeling, and his love turns to passionate hate. His understanding is not shaken in itself, but possessed by passion. The Fool is the 'middle member' in his character: when the madness is confirmed and his understanding ceases to have a voice,



the Fool disappears. On Lear's recovery we see his natural character, no longer disfigured by passion. While others are driven by passion to their hasty deeds, Cordelia, in the depth of her loving nature, is lifted above all passion. Yet in answering her father as she did, she drew her fate down on her head. She knew her sisters and must have suspected the lot to which she left her father; therefore she is partly responsible for his state of mind. Nevertheless, we cannot be reconciled to her fate, and must fall back on the eternal truth that where weakness and sin war against the world-order, every one concerned, more or less guilty, is thrown into the scales.

In all Shakespeare's dramas a common current of fate predominates that controls the lives of those concerned. Innocence is the distinguishing quality in *Othello*; besides the chief characters, it appears even in Brabantio who is attracted to Othello and never suspects that the same attraction may wake love in his daughter's heart—and alike in Roderigo, Cassio, Emilia. Othello is not the type of a jealous man, and yet jealousy drove him to kill Desdemona. All his experiences had contributed to heighten his manly virtues, but one leaf of his soul was blank: he had no measuring-rod to gauge the worth of his fellow-creatures; he knew neither himself nor others. His vulnerable spot was his honour and also the object of his love—in which he is simultaneously assaulted; therefore the whole power of passion, which as a man of honour he could deny because himself unconscious of it, turns against the inborn nature of his character. The effect of passion warring against his natural disposition is shattering: chaos of feeling in one whose happiness had lain in true-heartedness, glad confidence, well-wishing, and honour. Iago is diabolic, but is he wholly responsible for the tragic consequences? We detect in Othello's mood something that made him over-susceptible—he was intoxicated by unaccustomed happiness, remote from his previous soldier's life. He was too unsuspecting, e.g. when inquiring into Cassio's outbreak he asks nothing about the man whom Cassio beats. If tragedy deals with catastrophe due neither to chance or compulsion, but to the individual's inmost nature, we have all that fulfils its demands.

A sense of fatality impresses us in *Macbeth*. Banquo was Duncan's close attendant, and had he glanced into the antechamber—as he should—and seen the stupefied grooms, he could have made murder impossible.<sup>1</sup> The Princes flee, and the bewildered thanes forget the Prince of Cumberland's right to succeed—all these things are the result of a fatal influence. Ambition does not distinguish Macbeth more than imagination and weak will. Lady Macbeth took advantage of his bewildered condition after the meeting with the Witches—the state of intoxication in which alone he was capable of murder. Having first obeyed demonic impulses, his later crimes are due to personal

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Flathe.

impulse: not to power of will, but to a fresh unsettling possession by a power that replaces the Witches' influence. Lady Macbeth's nature is entirely that of a woman; she had upheld her husband's weak will, and now, seeing the havoc wrought, she succumbs. A wholly bad woman would have abetted her husband's further crimes—but she remains alone with despair. The thought of his guilt, as well as her own, fills her mind, for in the sleep-walking scene she recalls Lady Macduff in whose fate she had no personal concern.

In *J.C.*, above all the plays, Shakespeare complied with deep and poetic intuition with the essential demands of tragedy in the highest sense of the word. What is human and personal in Brutus and Cassius has more to do with the play than their political opinions. The quarrel scene gives the key to both characters and to the final catastrophe. Cassius, formerly harsh and violent, displays deep feeling that wins our sympathy and seems to warn of his approaching fate. We know not whether we love Brutus most for the qualities that attract, or for the heroism that distinguishes him. Unlike Hamlet he had the will not to fail; but the inner root of the tragedy is the same: a lesser idealist would have seen that Antony and Octavius must die. The final verdict is given in the scene of Caesar's ghost. The whole matter is seen in a purely human and not a political light. *A. and C.* leaves an impression of mutual passion of demonic power, the more formidable that with Cleopatra the urge to use every means to satisfy her desire is mingled with the highest intellectual gifts. The magic of her fascination makes what is blameworthy seem attractive. Not passion and weakness but overmastering power causes the tragedy of *Coriolanus*. Shakespeare's picture is individual rather than historical. Nothing is left vague—no riddle: a trait to be noted in comparison with his greatest works. With less speculation, all hangs on profound emotions of spirit. The whole accords with the temper of the ancient world, and it is a modern fault to brand Coriolanus as a type of aristocratic arrogance. Shakespeare's objectivity prevents personal bias, and we cannot learn directly that he considers either side right or wrong. To Plutarch's picture of plebeian cowardice and untrustworthiness he adds mother wit and primitive heartiness. He excelled in drawing characters in which opposing elements clash, and in showing character developed by circumstances. Coriolanus was stiff-necked and violent, but also true-hearted and genial. He won the people's voices without submitting to forms—proof that he was not tactless and odious—and he was beloved by a circle of friends. He rejected spoil, pleaded for the poor man who had entertained him, avoided applause—all signs of goodness and pleasant nature. We doubt even if his passionate outburst against the people was the mark of a haughty temper. He undertook the true duties of an aristocrat—he was first in danger. Perhaps Shakespeare did not wish to condemn the lower class, but to contrast

the common and noble. But if the indignation of Coriolanus is justified, not so his headlong passion. Even his superhuman courage is the result of uncontrolled anger. Like all tragic figures he is a mixture of characteristics—sensible to the noblest impressions, with strength and heroic temper, scorning death and wounds, but powerless against passion.

Troilus has not a hero's attributes, yet not he alone but all that concerns him personally are the only things that appeal to our feelings in the play of *T. and C.* Neither the academic, rhetorical tone of the remaining persons nor their affairs affect our feelings; and the play therefore lacks harmonious unity. The Greeks, deprived of their poetic nimbus, appear worse than the Trojans; yet study of the sources makes us conclude that Shakespeare was not satirizing ancient Greek poetry or parodying Homer. His genius was intimately related to his age and to the past. Himself a romantic, he was influenced by the classical spirit of the Renaissance, and he could not always reconcile the two. *T. and C.* leaves a contradictory impression, because reawakened veneration for classic antiquity is in harsh contrast with the romantic outlook. We see from the portraits of Cressida, Pandarus, Thersites that the intention is not to satirize Greek antiquity, but the evils of his day under the cloak of an old Greek saga.

In old merry England immorality was leniently judged, and *M. for M.* shows Shakespeare following the general tone. But he rises above his contemporaries, since he brings these offensive subjects forward to serve as background to the noblest: though he never represents his noblest characters as entirely unaffected by the general weaknesses of humanity. Lucio is indifferent to virtue and conscience: but Claudio is driven by passion. Yet the dividing line is thin; the two are friends; and fear of death makes Claudio persuade his sister against her honour. Angelo hides his lust under a mask of virtue: but is he more to be condemned than Lucio? Vice should be judged by its quality as vice, not by the impression it makes on our feelings. Shakespeare marks these different grades of human delinquency, and instead of producing good stuff for laughter, like his fellow-dramatists, shows it up against the characters of Escalus, the Duke, Isabella. *Timon* lacks the stamp of Shakespeare's poetic individuality, but the details show undoubted traces of his hand: no contemporary could have risen to the supreme irony of Timon's misanthropic anger. The character of Timon interested Shakespeare, but we miss the general atmosphere of all the other plays—the prominent general trend of mind affecting more or less every individual, and in which there is something fateful. Timon's lavish expenditure is not an admirable quality; therefore tragic conflict, either outward or inward, fails. That his friends would respond equally is an ancient delusion, and not enough to cause tragic overthrow of a noble disposition.

*Cymbeline* also is without general governing atmosphere, or common trend of feeling among all characters concerned forming a spiritual relationship between them. However, the general harmonious impression of the play is maintained; more obvious is the discrepancy of character and tone in the different scenes, unusual with Shakespeare. Domestic affairs, romance among Welsh mountains, Roman tribute—contrast with each other, to the loss of unity of plot. That the work retains its charm is due to the irresistible power of innate genius: and we grant that not every play of Shakespeare's is a model to copy. It has been debated whether the outcome should be catastrophe or reconciliation; and we think the wager of Posthumus is fitted to cause a tragic issue. Imogen is not blameless—she should have seen the danger of remaining in relations with Iachimo. Nor would Cloten have thought of borrowing a garment from Posthumus, or Imogen have mistaken his corpse for her husband's, if she had not prized the least garment of Posthumus above Cloten's whole person—and this is the fateful cause. Shakespeare most of all shows here the connexion between circumstance and the individual's fate: Imogen proves her innocence and is reconciled to Posthumus by a wonderful combination of outward circumstances, independent of her own action. A deep meaning may thus be discerned in the scene of the vision of Jupiter. Fate's workings seem to us mysterious and confused, when suddenly misfortunes are smoothed away and contradictions reconciled, and we acknowledge a higher power. Careful study reveals Shakespeare's usual striving after organic unity. The seemingly loose and arbitrarily connected threads of the plot join in the interest in the love and fate of Imogen and Posthumus. Imogen is the reconciling spirit; the harmony of her nature is never distorted by passion; we are not moved by violent emotions; and her conduct makes possible the solution.

We pass over the so-called anachronisms of the *W. Tale*, and remind ourselves that Shakespeare made the incredible credible by power of genius. Few plays more reveal his artistry, deep feeling, wide experience, humorous gaiety. From the outset the speech of all has the tone of unrestrained feeling: mutual protestation of courtesy, gratitude, &c.; and so tension rises to the height of passion. Act IV starts afresh, and we get that characteristic mingling of fantastic and ideal which is the kernel of Shakespeare's individuality and secret of his magic. Perhaps it sounds excessively fabulous that Paulina should have hidden her mistress for sixteen years, or that the life of the statue should not have been perceived immediately: but against this we set the charm of the whole picture of remorse, love, fidelity. The jealousy of Leontes, unlike that of Othello, is due to underlying defect of temperament. He is a prey to restless irritability, overstrained sensitiveness of disposition, and we detect in his speech from the beginning a lack of restfulness and inward harmony. His sudden change of feeling

has been called inadequately motivated: but the stage has bounds, not epic breadth. One consuming disease makes way for another; and both are rooted in the same ground—overstrung passion of love, and fear of losing the dearest object. What makes his jealousy unbelievable is the actual charming person of Hermione. Unlike Desdemona she keeps her balance under pressure of fate: and so reconciliation is foreseen from the first.

Shakespeare started by contemplating the universe, and so gathered knowledge of the individual. No one has clearer perceived the struggle of human freedom against the might of circumstance. The problem is right balance—freedom of will checked by excitement or passion which circumstance seems to justify; yet there is no case where freedom is annulled by capricious fate—no fatality without guilt, and no guilt without softening in its fate. These remarks introduce the *Tempest*, that ranks with *Hamlet* as the profoundest of Shakespeare's plays. It is conceived in merry fashion, and well called a comedy. We cannot take the shipwreck seriously when we see the behaviour of the individuals—and so with all the cares and hardships that follow. Ferdinand is a light-hearted wood-carrier; Caliban's plagues are of a comic nature; an airy breath of the comic, a touch of fine irony, surrounds even Prospero. But in the end the comic effect does not mar the impression of profound seriousness. With regard to the supernatural, Shakespeare stirs our imagination with the wings of the spirit-world, till we have the illusion of direct association. We believe in Ariel as an embodied being, and do not ask if he belongs to earth, air, fire, or water. He is essentially human—impatient to be released like a good child—who can grumble at injustice, but is easily reconciled. Prospero is hardly the pattern of moral loftiness that he has been called by critics. It has been suggested that Shakespeare was thinking of James I, and his work on demonology.<sup>1</sup> Extravagant zeal for deep studies made Prospero desire solitude and forget his duties as king. He gives way to this dreaming fondness with a self-satisfaction in which there is something delicately comic. His actual power is less as magician than in his good fortune to have Ariel as a servant. Were he a true worker of miracles he would know all, and not need Ariel's report of happenings. It is surely also comic that he believes the love of Ferdinand and Miranda due to his contriving, and that he can only make his power felt by setting Ferdinand to household tasks. But we do not deny that he is wise and noble-minded—delicately comic, not laughable. He accepts his fate like a wise and noble man, and draws comfort from deep study. He has reared Miranda to be the woman she is—and the impression she makes fills up gaps in his character. The man so rapt in science as to forget all else now loses himself in the happiness of another. In the end his nobility shines forth in his mild and pleasant

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Miss Winstanley.

behaviour and simple speech, and there is no more comic weakness. He has an important motive to forgive: he is conscious of his own shortcomings as king—and these weighed on his soul. The play is not the result of the poet's human intention, but of the transcendental influence that governed his genius. . . .

We recognize a lighter touch in Friesen than in many who have gone before; he is not deaf to Shakespeare's inner poetical voice. He keeps a right balance that reminds us at times of Mézières and Professor Herford. Now and then he has a lapse—as when he remarks on the exchange of garments in *Cymbeline*—or overpraises *J.C.*—or takes Prince Henry at his outer valuation and says that his nobler nature escapes contagion. Also, he estimates Shakespeare's philosophy—fate, character, circumstance, passion—more satisfactorily in general than in particular. But he approaches Shakespeare's self in the right agnostic spirit—admitting that the mystery of *Hamlet* cannot be solved—and suggesting rather than affirming that a change came over him after the joyful comedies. He also sees through the outworks of a play into its heart of poetry; his critical powers are stimulated, if not by the music of its words, at least by the beauty of its thought. Thus his remarks on the moral collapse of Richard III, on the passion that dominates all in *R. and J.*, the injustice in *John*, and the innocence in *Othello*. His vision is fine enough to detect an imaginative web flung over earthly things; only meditation could have told him that Othello's unaccustomed happiness made him an easier prey to Iago, that in *Hamlet* we see the bad characters as in social life; that Lady Macbeth was haunted by her husband's guilt as well as her own; that the fairy atmosphere of the *Merchant* makes all things possible; that the catastrophes of the *Tempest* are not serious; and that Miranda's character fills up gaps in Prospero's. This power to breathe in the rarer air of Shakespeare's imaginative world inspires some fault-finding of the better class, viz. that the courage of Coriolanus sprang from anger—that the refusals of Timon's friends were not enough to cause the tragic overthrow of his mind—and Hermione's charming person makes the jealousy of Leontes unconvincing. He touches more imaginatively a point raised by Flathe—that Banquo was not guiltless—one of the few instances of helpful external criticism. His remarks on the characters of Lear and Cordelia and the fate of Cordelia are those of one who feels deeply a mystery he does not attempt to explain. Now and then the suspicion crossed us that he is not the kind of critic who could have discovered Shakespeare for himself, that he took Shakespeare's reputation on trust from the world and used his experience merely to corroborate accepted opinions; but his penetrating comments on the *W. Tale* and the *Tempest* make us chary to do more than hint at this suspicion.

## VI

GRILLPARZER<sup>1</sup> is not satisfied with the many solutions of the fundamental idea in *Hamlet*. Probably the cause of the inexplicable effect of the play is partly that the thread running through this labyrinth remains invisible—whence it becomes a faithful picture of life's happenings and produces the same vast effect. Dreadful things take place with hardly any purpose; the actual aim of the whole is almost beyond sight; and then, when all seems over, fate fulfils itself. Only Shakespeare's genius gave effect to this loose coherence. When critics declare Hamlet too poor-spirited to carry out the deed, they forget that he thrust Polonius through, believing him to be the King. He is not without strength, but his strength is decomposed by melancholy. It was his natural disposition, and also aggravated by suspicion and inactivity after his father's death. The deed also was a difficult one, and had to be carried out in the midst of the usurper's adherents.<sup>2</sup> His object was to seize the crown, not to be murdered himself. Melancholy need not be a sign of weakness, but may arise when equal reasons are present for or against an action, with result that the powers wear themselves out. Only determined action can free such a sufferer; but to what definite action does the Ghost summon Hamlet? A melancholy man cannot be roused to energy in view of such a goal. Timoleon, after his brother's murder, became melancholy, without reproof of weakness, till resolve to free Syracuse rid him for ever of melancholy.

We see Antonio, who cannot enjoy life himself, enjoying it through Bassanio. He loves, woos, hopes, suffers with him, and even encourages him in his frivolous carelessness. It is true that Falstaff is no coward, and, considering his intelligence, he must have possessed many other good qualities: all swallowed up in love of pleasure. As he increased in girth he deteriorated in morals—and his melancholy mood is half-unconscious sense of his degeneracy. For this reason he does what he wills without offending us, but remains our favourite, so that the end of the play does not please us. Also Shakespeare's inspiration declined over half of this last play.

*M. for M.* has some masterly, unexcelled features, but it is one of the mediocre plays; and it is absurd of Gervinus to rank it with *Othello*. It is prejudiced from the beginning by a ludicrous pre-supposition: such a law can only be imagined under a legendary Kalif. We lose sight of this in the more moving scenes, but the shadow remains, stamping the whole as unreal and theatrical. Shakespeare feels this, and gives much space to the comic, and also to the fabulous—such as the substitution of Mariana. No one takes it as a piece of true life—the aim of true drama. The chief merit is in the characters, especially Isabella; but like other Shakespearian characters, however

<sup>1</sup> *Historical Literature*, 1874.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Werder.

highly disposed, she remains so only as long as the plot permits, and then her nature is checked by the needs of the action. Shakespeare at times deals with his characters as he likes: thus he relegates Lady Macbeth to the background when she has done her work of inciting her husband—until the final unsurpassed scene. Isabella is one of his noblest creations, yet she so far forgets her former strict morality as to connive at the substitution of Mariana. And her strong resolve to enter the cloister easily yields to marriage with the Duke. We may assume, from his final reprieve, that Angelo has good qualities—which so contradict his shameful conduct that he belongs to a fictitious world. That of all the guilty, Lucio, the least guilty, alone is punished, is a crying satire on the title. Nevertheless, the play contains enough that is delightful and admirable to win lasting fame for any other poet. The fault lies with the critics who rank it among the masterpieces.

Shakespeare excels in truth to nature, and *Othello* is psychologically the truest picture of human jealousy. Iago's insinuations and Othello's struggles between love and suspicion are the true causes of jealousy in real life—but they do not bring it to birth in so short a time. Shakespeare gives a compendium of nature rather than nature itself, and compresses into the third act that for which five acts would hardly suffice. The remainder of the play adds nothing except the murder, for the handkerchief is no serious proof. It is unlikely that Desdemona would make such a significant love-token serve as a common pocket-handkerchief. Shakespeare follows nature's way but cuts it short, and herein lies the truth and untruth of his work—and his characters. Desdemona is an angel of purity, yet she flies secretly from her father's house. Iago's character is admitted to be impossible: which we will believe out of respect to human nature. Yet these faults do not disturb us, because Shakespeare's truth is that of impression, not analysis. Such is his power of execution and impersonation that we cease to think of possibilities, since truth is before our eyes. His gift of representation has all the prerogative of nature, which we must recognize even where we do not understand. We must also remember that Shakespeare's audience probably preferred varied events to psychological differences; and that he worked upon ready-made material.

What differentiates Shakespeare from other poets is that the receptive and reproductive outweigh the productive: the actor is as industrious as the poet. Productive imagination gives figure and form, and is satisfied with the superficial; but the receptive probes the depths and develops what is individual and permanent. As an actor Shakespeare had to personify characters and situations, and to write from within outwards, not the reverse. He lived his characters as he wrote them, and was as much the general actor of his plays as their author. That he was little a poet in the ordinary sense of the word we see from the failure of his lyric-epic attempts. *Venus* has scattered beauties, but



is coarse and offensive, *Lucrece* is subtle and affected. His genius unconsciously came to its full when he wrote for the stage, and he became the greatest poet of modern times while only thinking to earn his bread. . . .

The merit of Grillparzer is that when his theories differ from his total impression, he trusts the latter, and finally he reconciles theory and impression without straining the truth. That his judgements are the result of meditation, not logical analysis, we see from the faults he finds with *M. for M.*, and, to a lesser extent, with *Othello*. He reacts against the universal praise of such critics as Gervinus, and attempts to define the exact nature of Shakespeare's greatness. In this he is abreast of modern thought, as when he says that Shakespeare's profession of actor added something to his genius—that he adapted plays from ready-made material rather than created them, and made hack-work the means to attain poetic summits—and that his formal narrative poems do not reflect his soul. His opinion on *M. for M.* is that which obtains at the present day—that it has magnificent parts, but is imperfect as a whole. His remarks on Desdemona's handkerchief show that at times he descends to the literal Teutonic habit. And his stricture on the third act of *Othello* proves that he is excluded from the inmost shrine—that he cannot appreciate the power of Shakespeare's words and rhythms to create the illusion of infinity. With Hamlet he inclines to be too abstract, to consider him less as an individual than a case for the moral physician.

## VII

JULIUS THÜMMEL<sup>1</sup> writes that Shakespeare so poetically transfigured the Fool that he became an indispensable element in the organism of the drama concerned. As he takes no part in the action he is lifted above his surroundings, and pitilessly utters his jesting metaphysics. He thus best represents the comic and popular idea that life is a mixture of absurdities and contradictions, at which the wise laugh. The Fool expresses Shakespeare's own comic view of life, and has ethical significance, and so holds up a mirror to those about him that they see their true aim.<sup>2</sup> Wisdom may be hidden in burlesque or cynicism, but the core remains ethical. It matters not that the Fool's wisdom passes unheeded: the more striking it is, the less aware of it are those blinded by folly. The Fool stands too much apart to be an individual, but the Clown is so by nature—Aguecheek, Gobbo, Grumio. The Fool differs from the ancient Chorus in that he is impartial and serene, and his element is the negative; and yet he has the human trait of devotion to his master. Touchstone follows Celia—the Fool of *Twelfth-Night* is devoted to Olivia—and he of *All's Well*

<sup>1</sup> 'The Fool in Sh.' (*Jahrbuch*, 1874).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Garve and Bucknill on Sh.'s use of insane persons to express truths.

to his young Countess—and Hamlet has kindly recollections of Yorick.

The Fool in *Lear* belongs to a rude age where even gentle Cordelia cannot express herself softly. This is even more conspicuous with Kent, and the Fool has the single aim of making Lear realize his folly, though he knows that he is driving the old man mad. But he is as faithful to his master as steadfast in convincing him of his folly. Truth itself is his aim, and so we glimpse the ethical—and as Lear shrinks from the bitter sarcasm we get the peculiar effect of irony, more wounding than laughter-provoking. He is the genuine ironic figure, which with all that may be comic in itself, in its final effect is tragic. The mass of events in *Lear* forbids psychological expansion of character, and the Fool supplies the need. By the piquancy of his reflection he enhances the tragic intensity of the plot far above what was possible with the ancient contemplative charms. He disappears because his task is over, and the tragedy that follows speaks for itself. To pursue the broken old man further would be to scoff at misfortune.

Touchstone is a contrast to the ironic Fool, and those around him are inclined to look upon him as a literal fool. But he has been too long at court not to know that he must appear a fool to be able to reproach his surroundings with their folly. A true humorist, without bitterness and irony, he uses his wit in all good nature. He adapts his humour to his audience, and his enjoyment of all this is exceedingly comic. He spices his conceits with the general idea of the folly of human existence, and at the same time stands to his motto that the fool thinks himself wise, but the wise man knows that he is a fool, and as he ranks himself with the wise his irony plays on himself as well as others. He has something of the clown's individuality, and takes the step of an individual in marrying Audrey; but the last act is so independent of the whole plot that he still stands apart from it—and adds to the humour of his part by becoming the subject of his own mockery as regards the love freaks of others.

The Fool of *Twelfth-Night* is portrayed with greater affection, but his part is confined to entertaining Olivia or revelling with the dissolute youth. He takes no material share in the plot against Malvolio, and does not influence the action. He is the typical Fool who looks on and reflects, with humour equal to Touchstone, but his humour is innate, not the product of abstract thought. Unbroken gaiety is his element; he must laugh, and laugh at others. His wit consists in seeking out what is irrational in the deeds of those about him, or designedly pursuing their weaknesses. . . .

This criticism does not share the defect of much philosophical criticism, which makes discoveries so far removed from the poet's conscious intention that they cease to be significant. It is permissible to think that in the matters discussed by Thümmel Shakespeare worked

instinctively rather than deliberately; but the critic's analysis brings home to us the aesthetic Shakespearian truth. He shows that the Fools are great because detached from the outer drama; yet they react upon the characters and therefore play their part in the final inner effect of the drama. His most striking point is that truth itself is the aim of the Fool in *Lear*—a tribute to Shakespeare's moral but undidactic method. His finest distinction is between Touchstone and the Fool of *Twelfth-Night*.

The same author, writing about the child in Shakespeare,<sup>1</sup> declares that its part must be episodic, even when the plot turns on its fate. There are sixteen children in Shakespeare, each with a different stamp. The whole action of *John* does not rest till French vacillation, Austrian duplicity, mutual hatred of Elinor and Constance, the King's greed, and the perfidy of Rome have all been unladen upon the guiltless Arthur. He is entirely a child—an ethereal, purifying element in himself in the midst of a whirl of evil. Though his intellectuality is a sign of precociousness and premature wisdom, he is still a child who betrays no political inclination or suspicion of his public mission. Politics revenge themselves for such neglect, and on those who lack active power; he is therefore dedicated to destruction. Too gentle by nature to play the part allotted him by fate, he does not die for his rights, but because he turned his back on them. Edward of Lancaster is every inch a prince, and every fibre of him is political. Self-conscious and brave, he steps forward among the peers to face his father, and attaches himself to his mother because she fights for the Red Rose, and plays the part of king and father. It is thus to the end, and he receives his death-stroke without relaxing for a moment. Perhaps young Lucius in *Titus* is Shakespeare's most fully developed child; and the terrible background gives added attraction to his character. At first he is tender and feeling, but when he knows what has happened he is filled with the Roman spirit of revenge on the barbarians. But he is naturally not present at the catastrophe, and remains uncontaminated, and shows himself a true offspring of Titus. We rest assured that he will not bring his father's good work to naught.

The pages in Shakespeare are mostly cunning knaves, except Lucius in *J.C.*, who is devoted to his master Brutus and to Portia. The nobler spirit of both Brutus and Portia is mirrored in Lucius. Falstaff's page is skilled in the manners of Eastcheap; but the naïve merriment with which he cheats makes us like him. The more Falstaff mocks at him the more we are pleased with him; and though the devil bids hard for him he has a good angel. After Falstaff's death he is left to Pistol, Bardolph, and Nym, and cannot abide their emptiness. Moth (*L.L.L.*) is his colleague, freer in speech and conduct, a pert little mocker, more type than individual, with plenty of mother wit, and

<sup>1</sup> *Jahrbuch*, 1875.

satire against Euphuism. Yet he betrays a certain personal attachment in his anxiety for his master's woollen shirts.

Mamillius (*W. Tale*) is respectful to his choleric father, and knows when to please him by showing his more boyish side. Among the court ladies he is thoroughly at home, capricious and spoilt, liking or disliking this or that lady. He begins a tale to his mother, then breaks off to whisper in her ear. When she is taken away he dies of grief. The most precocious child drawn by Shakespeare is Lady Macduff's son. . . .

The above interests because it follows a path rarely trodden by the Shakespearian critic, and bears witness to the fact that life never fails in Shakespeare, even at the outskirts. The most original remark is on Mamillius, who will become for us in the future more complex and individual. We naturally demur to his praise of Lucius (*Titus*) as another instance of judging by outer event rather than inner spirit; but on the whole, by pointing out the reactions of the child's character on those who play leading parts—e.g. Lucius (*J. C.*), and Falstaff's page—Thümmel helps us to realize the inmost unity of a Shakespearian play. The comparison of Falstaff's page and Moth is not without interest.

## VIII

AMONG the general remarks of the above critics we have to notice some striking contradictions; but only Benedix questions his mastery of character-drawing. Grillparzer finds that he sacrificed his characters to the needs of the plot; but he says also that truth to nature is what makes him the first of poets. König praises his profound psychology and faithful portrayal of men and actual life. Rümelin says that he has infinite power to draw character, is internally a Proteus, and his characters are individuals. He finds in him much faulty psychology and failure in realism due to want of knowledge and experience of the world—but great knowledge of men from inner experience and outer observation. Friesen says that he is aware of the subtlest workings of the heart, and his tolerance is united with keenest insight into character. He is skilled in drawing complex characters, and showing character developed by circumstances. Thümmel finds his creative power most unfailing when he portrays children. Schmidt, like Rümelin, says that he has infinitely various moods of soul.

Benedix calls him wildly romantic, whereas König says that he does not idealize love. Rümelin maintains that, in spite of his knowledge of character, he has only moderate insight into the causal connexion of human actions and fate. Friesen credits him with the reverse—with wonderful insight into the secret connexion between character and fate. According to König he has profound artistic understanding. Rümelin discovers that he is scene-wise, that the richness of the parts impairs the firm structure of the whole, and that his plots are improbable. Grillparzer calls him a compendium of nature rather

than nature itself. König notes the fantastic background to all his plays. Friesen affirms that the mingling of the fantastic and ideal is the kernel of his individuality and secret of his magic.

On moral subjects, Rümelin says that in Shakespeare vice and cunning bring their own punishment. Friesen says that he has an impartial moral and religious outlook, that the final decision rests with man, not fate or the supernatural, that he has the deepest reverence for the highest moral and religious truths, and completely vindicates the moral principle. Rümelin denies to him all but moderate knowledge of history. Friesen says that he is inclined to be aloof from men's affairs, and thought less of politics than the human nature of political figures. The only outstanding remarks on religion are Friesen's—that he interprets both human and divine matters, and his veneration for the unfathomable mysteries of the ordering of the universe appears throughout his works.

Rümelin speaks of him as a gigantic genius. To Friesen he is noble-souled, aristocratic, impartial and lenient, but extraordinarily objective, so that the riddle of his true being is insoluble. With Grillparzer the receptive and reproductive in him outweigh the productive. . . .

Universal praise is yielding to criticism of a controversial rather than impartial nature: as if the writer's first object was to confute those who had been guilty of excessive admiration. It is objected that Shakespeare worked scene-wise, at the expense of the whole; and the inevitable consequences of writing for a rude audience—as noted by many French critics and certain English critics of the early eighteenth century—are now restated.

